

THE HOUSE ON SMITH SQUARE

By the Author of

THE HOUSE ON CHARLES STREET



Class PZ 3

Book B939

Copyright N^o Hoe. COPY 2

COPYRIGHT DEPOSIT.

THE HOUSE ON SMITH SQUARE

THE HOUSE ON SMITH SQUARE

BY THE AUTHOR OF
THE HOUSE ON CHARLES STREET

Library of the University of Michigan (1891)



NEW YORK
DUFFIELD & COMPANY
1923

Copy 2

P23
P. 939
Has
copy 2

Copyright, 1923, by
DUFFIELD & COMPANY

23
7

©CL A696745

Printed in U. S. A.

MAR 13 '23

no 2

CONTENTS

BOOK I

FALMOUTH	1
--------------------	---

BOOK II

WROXETER OLD HOUSE	47
------------------------------	----

BOOK III

LONDON	145
------------------	-----

EPILOGUE	285
--------------------	-----

BOOK I
FALMOUTH

CHAPTER I

“GEORGE—do look at her now! Surely you agree that she cannot be English?”

Although Miss Rendall had lowered her voice and made but an imperceptible movement of the head in the direction of the person who interested her, yet there was an eagerness about her manner which caused her brother amusement. They had more than once discussed the question of Mrs. Ashburnham's nationality and so far he had not seemed to be aware of the subtleties which Mildred was so fain to read in that lady's appearance. He lifted his eyes now from his book to study the figure as it walked slowly away from them across the terrace towards the sea. Yes—he was willing to acknowledge that there was nothing English in the tall slenderness, the slim shoulders, the long waist, narrow foot and small, fine head with its black hair a marvel of simple arrangement. These were not English as he knew the type: nor was her plain, filmy, black frock, the absence of chains and ear rings and gew-gaws of jet, silver or gold. Ever since they first

noticed Mrs. Ashburnham, she had worn but one and the same ornament, and that was a string of old-fashioned oval garnets set in pale, indented gold and in hue a deep wine-red. This necklet had been the subject of their talk before to-day—Mildred contending that its color gave denial to that vague suggestion of mourning conveyed by the rest of Mrs. Ashburnham's apparel, — George insisting meanwhile, that mourning or no mourning, the lady knew that it was just the most becoming thing she could have worn and exactly calculated to bring out her delicate pallor and set off her large, dark eyes. Now, when standing some yards away from them, she turned her head—the sun caused the stones to burn for one instant round her throat in a thin crimson line, completing the already exotic impression. George Rendall received it and acquiesced. “All right,” he agreed, comfortably, “I can see what you mean if that is any good to you. We'll settle it that she's French if you like.”

“Or American!”

“Or American.”

He turned back to his book and was soon contentedly lost in it. His sister let hers rest unopened in her lap. The slender, black-clad woman's figure, quietly gazing seaward with the blood-red line sparkling about its throat, still held Mildred's attention. She was imaginative

and it had for some reason caught her imagination.

After a moment, Mrs. Ashburnham walked across the lawn to disappear down a flight of steps leading to the beach. Miss Rendall was obliged to find something else to occupy her mood of idleness.

The checkerboard marble terrace of the Falmouth Hotel was set out with green tables and tall palms in green tubs, whose stiff leaves rustled in the mild September breeze. A flat patch of greensward extended the level to a boundary of box hedges and shrubs that were faintly aromatic. The steps, down which the lady had vanished, led to a road, while a further flight on the other side dropped thence to a beach of rough, white sand. Beyond, one of the boldest of the Cornish headlands reared its bulk against the waves. At the right was the harbor entrance, defined by the cottages and steep-roofed buildings of the town. The sea hung before them a purple-blue curtain with a silver fringe of haze on it, sparkling in the sunshine and swaying delicately up and down the beach. Very indistinct, very distant, there moved on the horizon the strange shapes of unfamiliar craft, bringing to mind the sinister activities and mysterious terrors hidden behind that blue curtain. Miss Rendall remembered them with a contraction of the heart and thus was recalled

to her companion. She studied him with a new sense of criticism.

George Rendall presented a figure with which England was by this time sufficiently familiar, that of a tall, wiry, high-shouldered man, with a big-featured face, luminous eyes and a non-committal mouth, wearing the trig, not to say wooden, uniform of the United States Army. This uniform suited him unaccountably well, so well that his sister could not lose her first bewilderment at the professional cock of George's service cap. There seemed nothing to connect it with the George of two years ago, that George who went tranquilly to his office in a blue serge suit, from a house at Hempstead, Long Island,—that George to whose mind the word Europe bore a holiday connotation, pleasantly removed from the business of life; that very George who grew perfervid only over baseball matches, Presidential elections and the state of the cotton market! Mildred still wondered that he was the same man who at thirty-five had been making a very large income because he took no holidays, beyond a six-week's trip every other summer and an occasional Saturday at golf—the same who detested killing things! What unperceived stratum had lain hid in George and had come to the surface in the announcement (in the spring of 1916) that he intended to spend his summer in an officers' training-camp? Of

course lots of men were doing it, but they were younger. One would not have reminded George of this fact for the world—and one somehow remembered Uncle Henry who enlisted in Grant's Army at fifty-seven,—but still! The personality they knew as George had been so seldom moved toward new things; yet here he was—on January 31, 1917, to be exact, unfolding his morning paper with the meditative observation: "Well, I guess it's up to me!"

Mildred herself had been the first of the two to cross the ocean. She had gone over with one of the first Red Cross units and had been thoroughly disgusted when her post was assigned in England and not in France. But she had worked very hard in London and this was her first leave just as it was her brother's. He had gone direct to France and to the Front, and his sister even yet did not know what the service exactly was in which he had received both his wound and commendation from a number of people. In fact, there were moments in which Mildred felt that she had travelled down to Cornwall with a person she only slightly knew. The entire proportions of life for this person—the relative values—had so shifted that Mildred found herself during their daily intercourse constantly at sea. This was a George who never even glanced at the financial columns of their American newspaper, and who

spent his leisure reading strange books on the technique of destruction. This George was meticulous where he had been careless and careless where he had been meticulous—made the most incredibly savage remarks in the most matter-of-fact way and was strangely indifferent to his past gods. It was rather perplexing, and thus Mildred had welcomed her brother's vaguely expressed admiration for a fellow-guest of the hotel as furnishing a topic of mutual interest. Up to the present they had learned of this lady nothing but the name, which, though sonorous, had conveyed to them, being strangers, very little.

Meanwhile the palms rustled, and Miss Rendall fell to wondering how they survived, even in Cornwall, the English chill. A distant hooting came from a little boat entering the harbor. By and by, Mrs. Ashburnham appeared on the path leading from the beach, crossed the lawn with dragging step and vanished into the hotel. Her passing gave Mildred a feeling of restlessness: with an excuse to her brother she rose and followed the stranger. As she went, she looked back with renewed surprise at the tranquillity expressed by his reading figure. George had certainly acquired a new and singular patience, in which there was no trace remaining of the New York George Rendall.

Her chase of Mrs. Ashburnham was due to

a caprice of boredom. There was nobody else in the place in whom one could take the slightest interest. The array of fat old ladies with their knitting-bags was hardly more diverting than the groups of convalescent soldiers which George had especially requested they should avoid during his brief holiday. Her curiosity about the only person anywhere near her age was entirely natural.

It was easy—on pretence of some enquiry concerning the mails—to follow Mrs. Ashburnham at the desk of the manageress. Had this been a hotel at home, Mildred thought, nothing could have been made more easy for her than the first steps to an acquaintance. The custom of introducing hotel guests to one another which at home she had laughed at and reprobated as “thoroughly vulgar,” began to appear in the light of a nice, cordial custom. There is nothing like War and exile to shift one’s estimate of the vulgarities. Mildred resented the fact that a few, simple enquiries about a stranger should be made so purposely difficult.

Perhaps the manageress felt the appeal in the wistful face, the eager girl’s eyes. She had a remarkably stiff back and a cold gaze which seemed perpetually afraid of being taken advantage of. Still, when she supplied Miss Rendall with stamps, she did reply to her embarrassed and halting questions:

“Mrs. Ashburnham, madam? . . . Oh to be sure she is English. Colonel Ashburnham was one of our heroes. You have heard of him no doubt?”

Mildred humbly acknowledged her ignorance and felt it.

“Only fancy! I should have thought that even in the States they would have heard of Colonel Ashburnham . . . He had the V. C. and the D. S. O.—everything! Dead? Oh certainly, madam! He had been drowned last spring in the Channel when a transport was torpedoed. The king had written to Mrs. Ashburnham a beautiful letter . . . she looks very much crushed, doesn’t she, madam?”

Miss Rendall acquiesced, though privately she did not think that Mrs. Ashburnham looked particularly crushed; and she only excused the garnets in her own mind by supposing them to have been a parting gift of the dead hero. It was exciting to have discovered so much and made up for her being obliged to avow that she had been quite mistaken in the lady’s nationality. All this she poured out breathlessly to George—to whom she had at once flown back with her information—and her cheeks grew quite pink, so that she actually roused him to listen and light a fresh cigar. They chatted about Mrs. Ashburnham, off and on, for the rest of the afternoon, while strolling about the beach

or the crooked, stony streets and if George wondered a little at his sister's absorption in the subject, he was not at all unsympathetic; on the contrary a very pleasant look came into his eyes as they rested on the girl. No one knew better than he the power of trifles during a re-action from one's task, concerned as it perpetually was with the grim topics of suffering and death—and nothing could be more healthy than that Mildred's vital, and ever present interest in people should rise to its natural place in her mind. He was himself fully conscious of a similar tendency.

CHAPTER II

WHEN one is absolutely bent—"hell-bent" as George put it—on making an acquaintance, even in a land where people seemed to move about behind a ten-foot wall with glass atop and a sign to "keep off," even then things are apt to arrange themselves sooner or later, to the desired end. Miss Rendall kept her eye on Mrs. Ashburnham's movements for a day or two without results. She saw that Mrs. Ashburnham received a good many letters, long, thick ones on many sheets closely written, and that she sat about tranquilly enough and turned a dreamy gaze upon the curving sea. So seldom did she open the book she carried that Mildred began to think the manageress might be right after all and that Mrs. Ashburnham might be more "crushed" than appeared. The impression she had conveyed at first sight, of slender and composed distinction touched with intelligence, was heightened as one watched her move about among the other people in the hotel. The Rendalls had spent a week at Falmouth when George heard that certain fellow-officers—friends of his—were billeted in the neighbourhood. A great deal of clumsy and complicated telephone com-

munication followed, with the result that they arrived to carry him off for the day to the large camp which they occupied in the direction of St. Ives.

Mildred watched his departure from her window, with that same feeling of strangeness that so often of late swept over her moods. She was too completely the American girl to have grown used to being left behind on such an excursion—at home, of course, she would have been included. Here, it had never been suggested as a possibility, so readily had George acquired the habits of this man's-world. His sister leaned out to get a good view of the group in the car—that long, rakish, powerful thing under the conduct of a military chauffeur, who looked as proud as a peacock of the big “U. S.” painted on the side. Two or three young men occupied the seats, all of them were clean-shaven, wore eye-glasses under their leathern vizors and bore an expression of solemnity which again filled the watching Mildred with that helpless sense of change. All four looked exactly alike, though she knew that Pratt came from Bangor, Maine, and that Ingalls had never before quitted his native State, Kentucky; and when George climbed in and sat down between them he looked exactly like the others, and all three, so she disgustedly reflected, looked like imitations of General Pershing.

She watched the car glide away down the driveway out of sight and then betook herself to the beach, with the vague hope in her mind that she might fall in with Mrs. Ashburnham. But there was no such person sitting or standing on the empty stretch of sand.

Mildred Rendall walked along the water's edge in the direction of the headland. She felt not a little lonely and homesick. After all, this was September — and at home she and George would have been getting ready for a few days motoring in the Berkshires and an over-Sunday with their friends—the Murray Robertsons, at Lenox. At home she had always been his chosen companion for these expeditions and his pet name for her had been the “pleasure dog.” The hills were all afire with scarlet and yellow, the nights had a keen and tonic touch. The soft air, here, mild and equable, vaguely irritated her; George as a khaki-clad imitation of General Pershing irritated her also. No: she wasn't proud of him: she wished that he and all the rest of them would give it up and go home where they belonged and put on white flannels and never think of gas or bombs again! No: she didn't want to stay on all winter and work for the cause—she suddenly felt that she never wanted to see another uniformed woman in the whole course of her life. She wanted to go home, home to her mother and to her sister

and the babies. She wanted to go to the Horse Show and to the opening night of the opera with Farrar and Caruso. She wanted—oh how she wanted! a walk in front of the shop windows on Fifth Avenue, with all the lovely new clothes in them. What was the use of staying on here? The Germans were retreating; why should George simply stay on to get killed?

Just as this melancholy train of thought was fast plunging Mildred into a most unwonted depression of spirits—it was suddenly quite driven out of her head by the sight of a crimson something sparkling on the sand, a yard or so away from her. She darted forward and yes! there at her feet lay Mrs. Ashburnham's garnet necklet! Mildred stood still, holding it, quite stunned by the pleasant sense that the key to this door she so desired to open lay at last in her possession—when there came a faint cry behind her and she turned to see the owner of the lost jewel, running towards her and waving—face and eyes alight.

“Oh, you have it!” cried Mrs. Ashburnham, “Oh, I *am* glad!”

She panted after her run, her whole face vividly moved—half laughing at her anxiety and its relief.

“Oh, how fortunate!” she repeated, “I had just discovered it was gone—and I looked every-

where in my room before coming out here. How lucky that it should have been you!”

“It lay right here on the sand,” said Miss Rendall, as pleased as she. “Luckily, it has fallen on this dry patch so that it did not sink in. The stones flashed in the sunlight—they’re very pretty.”

“Aren’t they?” said Mrs. Ashburnham. “Of course garnets have not much value, I believe, but, you see, this was given to me by a dear, old friend, in her last illness. She died only a couple of months ago and she was my first English friend. I do cherish it—I wouldn’t have lost it for anything in the world! I *am* so much obliged to you!”

“But I did nothing—it simply lay there in front of me.”

Mrs. Ashburnham however, repeated her gratitude with as much animation and rapid speech as Mildred herself would have used. When her face lit, the fine, thin arch of her eyebrows curved up, her delicate mouth smiled showing her teeth; she looked very charming, very young, younger than they had thought. She could not be a day over twenty-six.

“My old friend chose it for me among all her ornaments,” she continued walking beside Miss Rendall, “she wanted me to wear it because I am dark. She thought it would be becoming.”

"It is *very* becoming," said Mildred, fascinated, awaiting, yet not quite daring to ask the meaning of a phrase which the other had just spoken.

"I have lived with her, you see, ever since my first coming to England—I had stayed there until I married," continued Mrs. Ashburnham.

"Then you are not English?" Mildred ventured with beating heart and imploring eyes.

Sidney Ashburnham had dwelt so long away from that outspoken interest in another person which is the prerogative as well as the custom of the New World—that it gave her a momentary shock, as if it had been illbred. But the eager face turned towards her aroused sleeping memories. She recalled what was really meant and answered it accordingly.

"No more than you are, except by marriage," she replied. "I was born within twenty miles of Boston."

"I knew it! I was sure of it! I told my brother so!" cried the triumphant Miss Rendall.

The two young women sat down side by side on the sand and plunged into conversation.

"So he's your brother and not your husband?" asked Mrs. Ashburnham, surprised at herself for being moved to a question so directly personal.

"You thought George and I? . . . Oh, how very funny! We've always been great friends,

but we must have seemed a strangely independent couple, if you had that idea! . . . This is George's first leave and I took a holiday to be with him. He's been wounded, you see, and he's worked tremendously hard in France. So we came down here to rest."

"It's wonderful to see them everywhere as one does nowadays—our men, I mean. When I remember how we waited and waited—how I wondered if they were ever coming."

"Then you have been living here since before we came in?"

The face turned towards Mrs. Ashburnham was that of a handsome girl in her early twenties, with brown eyes and hair with reddish lights in it. Major Rendall having said that he was "sick of the sight of an uniform," his sister had, not unwillingly, left hers in London. Her dress was fashionable, her personality sufficiently disarming: her voice, though unmistakable, was harmonious; while her eyes waited on her companion, with a deference wholly flattering. Yet Mrs. Ashburnham's impulse was to evade the explanation which the other awaited so eagerly in that friendly fashion. That she did not evade it was due to sensitiveness. She did not wish to seem un-American or out of touch with another social habit. So she answered:

"Yes, indeed, long before I came over to

take a European trip, with a college friend of mine—in June 1914. We were caught in the panic in Switzerland and had a horrid time getting to England. By that time the whole thing got hold of me. So I stayed on and my friend sailed home without me. She came back later: she's in France now, doing such splendid work."

"I envy her," said Mildred, with a little sigh, "that's what I longed to do—but they kept me in England."

Mrs. Ashburnham looked sympathetic and Mildred hastened to return to her story. "I wonder a little your family didn't mind your staying on."

"I haven't any. Both my parents are dead so really there is nobody to mind. First I worked in a hospital—not nursing—the office part. Then I became private secretary to a Member of Parliament and kept that position until I was married."

"It must have been awfully interesting?"

"Indeed it was."

Mrs. Ashburnham fell silent, and Mildred felt that to pursue her experience in detail might be intrusive. She too, therefore, turned her gaze upon the mauve and silver ocean upon whose waters the noontide sun was glittering. A dim ship passed over the edge of the horizon and both their eyes followed it.

“Haven’t you felt at all homesick?” Miss Rendall asked, half shyly. “When I see a ship like that, I often feel as if I couldn’t wait.”

“Homesick?” repeated Mrs. Ashburnham, as if the thought were a new one. “No, I can’t say I ever feel homesick.”

“Well, I love England myself,” the other hastened to assure her, “and I enjoy my work, though, *of course*, I’d far rather be in France. I like London and people have been kind to me. But other girls I know don’t like it at all—they feel strange here and not at all happy.”

“How odd!” remarked Mrs. Ashburnham; and the two words, in her slightly wondering tone, suddenly removed her worlds away from Mildred Rendall. “Of course I suppose if I were in your place,” the latter ventured, “I shouldn’t be so eager to sail for home when the autumn comes.”

“The States, after all, are not my home any longer,” was the other’s quiet comment as she folded her long hands together and looked gravely at her companion.

“Well, it seems now as though we—George and I, I mean, will be getting back before Christmas, anyhow,” Mildred said, after a pause.

And Mrs. Ashburnham nodded, but a little absently.

CHAPTER III

THERE was no doubt that the meeting with Mrs. Ashburnham added an element of novelty to the latter half of the Rendall's holiday. Both had been on the verge of being bored; Mildred not a little homesick; and the acquaintance had served to revive their zest in the daily business of life. Just why this should have been so was not altogether easy to determine, although both agreed that there was something fascinating about Mrs. Ashburnham. She had a certain intensity underlying her reserve—which was marked—and it became soon apparent that she had a high degree of intelligence. Evidently also, she had potential high spirits—although they were temporarily clouded by sorrow—which lifted her often into the mood of *joie de vivre*; while she displayed an adventurous attitude towards life which was full of interest for her less imaginative compatriots. This had come about from the fact of her having been tossed like a piece of seaweed from experience to experience; as she said, she was never sure upon what strange shores the tides of life were going to cast her next.

This situation alone, to Americans of George and Mildred's type, who are rooted and bound to place and task by the hundred bonds of duty and regular habit—which only a world cataclysm could have loosened—made her extremely romantic. However, her social experience in England seemed unaccountably wide and included many interesting people in the political world of whom the brother and sister knew nothing but the names. If at first they rather wondered how and why she had come to acquire this acquaintance, they soon accepted the fact that it was due wholly to the exceptional quality of her personality. Mrs. Ashburnham possessed just that little touch of vibrating response to and excitement about life, which is above all things the most attractive in a woman, especially when it is expressed by a sensitive mouth and large, shining dark eyes. Her charm was acknowledged by them both to be definite, though elusive, and George showed its effect on him by his reluctance to discuss it with his enthusiastic sister. Mildred, on her part, could now behold the great ships go by into the west without longings. She wrote pages and pages to her mother about her new friend and so poured out the admiration which her brother seemed anxious to evade.

As for Sidney Ashburnham, these were the first fellow-countrymen she had encountered for

four years and they raised in her an interest sympathetic as well as critical. In her absorption in the War and in those who were fighting it, she had for a long time felt very cold towards her own people and not desirous to meet any of them. At first this indifference had angered her; later their cool assumption of bearing the whole burden of War had irritated one who knew what such burdens really were, when loss was added to them. But this pair were doing their duty—even as she herself saw it—and showed nothing but a steadfast humility in the act. Particularly was it amusing to note in Mildred the identical attitude toward England and the English, the same mistakes and misunderstandings, the same puzzled surprise at the immutability of custom, which had been Sidney's own four years before. When she heard Mildred's wonder at an English Sunday or watched her smilingly array herself for Church in a bright-colored frock, quite unaware of the offence against decorum thus committed; when she heard her surprise that people who were satisfied to wait on themselves at breakfast, should consider it a disgrace if they were obliged to do it at dinner—Mrs. Ashburnham was irresistibly reminded of her own first year in the United Kingdom. As regards George, one did not tend to define one's feeling concerning him, further than that it was one of com-

plete confidence. He had a way of fixing his eyes on her—they were reddish-hazel eyes like his sister's only their look was penetrating and steadfast, where hers was receptive and seeking—of fixing on her eyes that seemed anxious to understand. In talk, he was shrewd, kind and unfailingly responsive: his criticism, rarely given, was sympathetic. If he did not comprehend the English, at least he wished to do so. One felt his quiet strength—and it reminded Mrs. Ashburnham of another soldier she had known, one who also took life, its dangers and its chances, entirely for granted. Yes: surely he was to be trusted and very much to be liked: and Sidney found herself in a remarkably short space of time consulting him on some of the perplexities of her widowhood.

“You see, my marriage lasted for so short a time,” she told him, on the afternoon they went across the harbor to see Pendennis Castle, “less than three months in all—that I never had time to go into things properly with my husband. We were so absorbed in the War—and life was so uncertain and hazardous—somehow it never seemed worth while. I have a trustee at home near Boston, but he's an elderly man and rather helpless, it strikes me, in the face of all these new conditions. I have written him, but I cannot seem to find out what I want to understand.”

Rendall answered her questions—they related to the new taxation and to the effect of War measures on investments—and told her very clearly all that she wanted to know. Mrs. Ashburnham was grateful and said so. “After all, it’s an odd position,” she commented. “I cannot make up my mind to transfer all I own in the world to this country. Yet I suppose I ought. In law, I am an Englishwoman, am I not?”

“Undoubtedly you are.”

“Then I suppose it is my duty. But things here are not so flourishing—though what Harry left, with the special pension they allow me, is enough, actually to live on, if not comfortably. I might let my income from the States alone, if I had to. But then suppose things get worse? Mr. Hansell, he’s my trustee, thinks I ought to come home.”

“I think so too. Certainly before transferring any property you ought.”

“I don’t quite see why.”

Major Randall explained quite seriously, not at all realizing what he really felt, which was that any lady—at least any lady so delightful as the speaker—ought to go to the States and stay there:

“You’ve given the reason yourself, Mrs. Ashburnham. England has borne the weight and economically shows plainly the strain of it in

exhaustion. Things are not flourishing—not at all. The laboring classes are sullen: they've been very badly handled, first not trusted and then molly-coddled; and they mean to have things their own way. That means trouble in the investment world. It's a poor time to invest money here, believe me." Then as he saw her reflective face, he continued:

" 'Tisn't that I'm knocking anything, or criticizing the English . . . when it comes to fighting this War, they know about that and I don't, and I'm going to learn from them. I guess it's every American's business just now to learn what England can teach. But when it comes to Business—the industrial and economic world—that's different. It's something of less importance at the moment but I know about it and I'm giving you my opinion."

"I'm grateful for it," said Mrs. Ashburnham. "Mr. Hansell says the same, but not so convincingly. He wants me to return as soon as I can and meanwhile to save as much as I possibly can. He's not at all cheerful about it and he seems to forget that this is my home."

George disliked the phrase. He asked abruptly: "What sort of investments have you?"

"Oh—mortgages and a few good railway bonds, more than I can afford to lose What especially bothers Mr. Hansell, poor dear, is a business matter that has come up most

unexpectedly. My father, who died when I was a child, owned an interest in a company that was apparently a failure. It seemed quite dead—hasn't paid a cent for years and years. I never even thought about it—it seemed a total loss. But now the War has changed all this and the factory has begun to make a profit and to show an unexpected earning power."

"What was the business—if you don't mind?"

She explained that it concerned the manufacture of a special substance which had suddenly proved to be essential to the conduct of affairs, whether at peace or at war; moreover that this small plant was the only one at present equipped for it in the States. Hearing this, her companion gave a long whistle.

"You don't say so! And you own a majority interest?"

"So it seems—only, the question is, how much do I own? The company is to be re-organized with new capital and Mr. Hansell is bothered for fear I may not receive my share."

"Get frozen out in the re-organization? I shouldn't wonder if your Mr. Hansell was right."

"Do you really think so? . . . I confess I had not taken him very seriously—it seems rather improbable that anything could come out of it after all these years!"

"You forget this War, Mrs. Ashburnham

. . . it alters everything. It wipes out values, or creates them, practically overnight."

"Then you thing this might be valuable?"

"All depends on how it's handled . . . certainly it ought to be."

"You think I should look into it?"

He replied almost impatiently: "No question, but you ought . . . you may be losing a solid little fortune . . . Look here, I tell you what we can do . . . I've a friend in New York who will be sure to know all about this company there is to know, once he has the facts. I'll write him to-night . . . it's quite all right, y'see, because he's absolutely straight. I'll tell him to find out what's doing and let you know."

"How good of you—will you really? Look, your sister is waving to us"

"But there's no doubt in my mind that you'll have to go home," George was careful to add and she saw the genuine friendliness in his face and smiled up to it. He was, she thought, quite an unusual man: in ordinary talk acquiescent and even diffident, accepting what was said and offering his views with deference, while the moment the subject touched on affairs, he became firm, clear and even distinguished. To him business, industry, economics, had passed from rule of thumb into the region of law and theory. In this realm he observed currents, estimated movements, accumulated data and

dealt with its resulting factors in a manner having a quality of imagination which showed where his mind was at home. Even the intelligent Englishmen, she knew, regarded all these matters as wholly unrelated to or outside of life, as the concern of experts merely: whereas Rendall seemed to regard them as the A. B. C. of everyman's existence—as those very Englishmen in turn probably regarded many things which Rendall knew nothing about, such as the habits of game or the exact moments in which one wears a top-hat. Mrs. Ashburnham was very much interested.

CHAPTER IV.

“SHE doesn’t talk much about the late hero, does she?” remarked George to his sister as they sat together that evening and waited for their new acquaintance to join them for dinner.

“Over here,” Mildred rejoined sagely, “husbands never mention wives nor wives husbands—dead or alive. I’ve noticed it often. They’re not partners and friends—they’re *belongings*, and one doesn’t talk about one’s belongings. They think we are so funny! One of the girls at Victoria Street said to me about your friend Captain Crosby, that she ‘spotted him for a Yankee because he at once began to tell her about his wife’.”

“That’s all very true . . . but *she’s* not English.”

“Oh but she is, George—in that way at least. Why, she’s never told us a thing about the people she knows and she knows heaps. You know how at home people one meets are always talking about their cousins the Smiths or their intimate friends the Brown-Jones? One simply can’t escape it.”

His shrug in reply was impatient. “Well, Milly, if you ask me, I like our way a great

deal better. You know where you are. Over here I keep feeling as though I were wandering around in a fog, among a lot of nameless shades . . . It makes me nervous not to know something about the chap I'm talking to. Now this fellow Ashburnham—I'd like to know what sort of a fellow he was . . .”

“Well, I've seen his photograph if that's any help to you. She has a big one on her bureau.”

“Well?”

“He's quite wonderful!”

“How do you mean wonderful? Handsome?”

“Much more than handsome, George. Such a vivid, arresting face. He had a big, high-bridged nose and long moustaches and a turban on his head, and a sword, and medals and decorations all over him. He was more like a foreigner than an Englishman—so thin and dark you know—so I asked ‘Isn't that some Eastern potentate?’ and she answered ‘That was my husband.’”

“Did he look like a gentleman?”

Mildred knew what her brother meant by that word, which in his mind held implications quite un-English and had nothing whatever to do with property or situation. The ideal he evoked, of a quiet, forceful well-bred personage in conservative clothing, reserved in manner, frank and fluent of speech, energetic in action and

extremely tender of his women folk—presented a contrast which made her laugh outright.

“He looked like a hero, like a Bayard—” she declared scornfully, “his whole personality was spirited and picturesque beyond anything I’ve ever seen. He must have been simply splendid.”

George had instinctively felt a dislike to the late Colonel Ashburnham and his sister’s enthusiasm confirmed it. But he said nothing at the moment because their conversation was interrupted by the smiling approach of the lady whose affairs had been the subject of it. The three went in and dined in great content, chatting with the freedom of compatriots meeting in a strange land. Mrs. Ashburnham appeared to have laid aside her reserve and began to tell them more about her own situation, while she questioned Major Rendall concerning American affairs. They came to hear all about her little income and pension, and how she drew the rent of a tumble-down old Manor-house where Harry Ashburnham had spent his boyhood. She told them also that he had always received in addition, an allowance from a rich aunt in Derbyshire, and how her solicitor had urged upon her the necessity of making the old lady a visit to secure its continuance to herself. She added, with a little fastidious gesture, that this idea was distasteful and so she had put it off.

"You see—I am used to being independent," she concluded, half-apologetically.

"You're American," declared George, whose spirits this speech had somewhat lightened.

"It's not that only," she smilingly answered him, "but you see—while I was secretary I drew a good salary and got on very well, living as I did with my dear old friend, who was so good to me and who knew all the thrifty ways to do things in this country. It puts one out of the humor of cosseting rich old aunties for an allowance—that sort of life—now doesn't it?" He emphatically assented and Mrs. Ashburnham continued:

"But it's this new taxation, it hits everybody! And to be taxed in both countries——!"

"Hard luck!"

"Mr. Hansell, of course, can't help it—he can only go on worrying about that re-organization and what I may lose. I suppose I should have paid more attention to him."

"Why don't you go right home and see about it?" Major Rendall asked her directly enough.

"Well——" she hesitated, "I don't know. I hadn't wanted—I hadn't really thought about it. And besides, I could never get a passport."

"I think you could. But of course you would have to stay there till the end of the War."

"Oh, but I couldn't do that!"

Mrs. Ashburnham spoke quickly, impulsively,

and then, at some thought which had evidently underlain this reply—her pale face became suddenly swept with a tide of crimson from chin to brow. Her companions felt her embarrassment: Mildred adjusted the laces of her own pretty evening gown, George looked studiously out of the window. There fell a pause after which it was easy to talk about something else. But George could not rid himself of the feeling that Mrs. Ashburnham did not want to go home and was troubled about it—a trouble quite subjective and one which she evidently desired not to formulate nor define. What could be the reason? He was conscious of a marked irritation that Mrs. Ashburnham should be or consider herself English. He wished her—now that her English husband was dead—to consider herself an American. Of course she was American—and she ought to go home to the country where—particularly now—there was safety and protection for women. The strength of his own conviction in the matter never struck him as absurd; he was too much occupied in uneasily wondering what thought had caused Mrs. Ashburnham's blush.

His silence gave his sister a chance, who had before felt just a little out of it—and the two women were soon laughing together. Then Mrs. Ashburnham was led to talk of English political life, and Major Rendall, over his cigar,

found himself listening to her with wonder and respect. How and where had she acquired her knowledge? She talked of the divisions of departments and their jealousies; of bureaucratic inertia and enemy propaganda, as one who knew them by intimate personal experience. If she had not met, yet she had seen and heard almost every man of political importance in the country and she seemed to have watched most of them very closely. She knew their personal idiosyncrasies and failings as well as all the little stories about them. She knew Mr. Lloyd-George's excitability and the lethargy of Mr. Balfour; she knew Mr. Asquith as a *bon-vivant*, Lord Welden as an eccentric, Lord French's penchant for gallantry and Lord Haldane's fondness for metaphysics. All this surprised Rendall who had looked upon social England as a shut and guarded castle. Perhaps it was natural that the wife of an Indian officer should know the depth and extent of the rivalry between the British and the Indian armies—as well as its nearly fatal consequences. But how in the world had she come to learn the trade situation, the abuse of the censorship and its results regarding the difficulties of certain firms, of whose cause very few men in New York were aware? Who had told her the actual details of Sir Hector Menzies' fiasco on the Somme and the present whereabouts of that unfortunate

soldier? Even military circles did not know these things. And there were moments, when George, listening attentively, became aware of even deeper knowledge which loyalty hid, showing that she had held the key to Bluebeard's chamber. "Look here," he remarked to his sister after Mrs. Ashburnham had said good-night, "How does she come to know it all as she does, anyway? And in this island, too."

"You must remember that she was a private secretary for nearly three years," Mildred reminded him; but the explanation failed to satisfy George.

"Pooh! What is a private secretary—when all's said?" he persisted, having the American's estimate of a position which he regarded in the light of an intelligent stenographer; together with a complete misapprehension of English habits of mind:—"No, I don't understand it."

"Well, it's no business of ours."

"Perhaps not, yet it bothers me."

"Why on earth should it bother you?"

George knew only one reason why it should and did not wish to explain it to his sister. He disliked the idea that Mrs. Ashburnham should have such intimate ties in this country as were likely to keep her here: he resented—yes, resented was the word—any friendships which might have power over her, and which made him suspicious as of something concealed. This

attitude was unwarranted and ridiculous in an acquaintance of not ten days standing; nor could George defend it against his own sense of humor, much less that of his sister. So he kept silence and bade Mildred good-night, rather vexed with himself for what he felt to be a childish curiosity together with causeless jealousy—for it was no less—of Sidney Ashburnham's past life.

CHAPTER V

LIFE in its social, in its conscious aspect, had been the chief preoccupation of the three people with whose acquaintance we are, for the time being, concerned. They found much, therefore, in common and all the more that with each of them individual interests had been in necessary abeyance during the past months. Thus they passed the pleasantest sort of week together and arranged to journey up to town on the same day, in the train named magnificently, the Cornish Riviera Express. Major Rendall wanted to spend the last few days of his leave in town and Mildred's holiday could not be prolonged. Both had suggested an immediate engagement with Mrs. Ashburnham, dinner at the Carlton and a play to follow, "by way of send-off to George," as the brave little sister put it, and it had been like a dash of cold water to hear that Mrs. Ashburnham was not staying on in town.

"Unfortunately, I cannot alter my plans," she said, when they sat talking it over in the railway carriage and watching the green velvet fields of Devon flash past the windows. "I've promised to spend these few days with a friend

in the country since long before I went to Cornwall . . . I can't say how long I shall be there but certainly until next week."

"Too late," was George's brief utterance.

"——But after that," Mrs. Ashburnham went on, hopefully smiling at Mildred in the corner, "I expect to be in town right along and we shall see a great deal of each other, I hope."

"And how about your going home?" asked Major Rendall, with a touch of gruffness.

"Home? Oh, you mean to the States?" (How that innocent little phrase withered George's heart!) "——Well, perhaps I may think about that later——only——" She left the sentence unfinished and after a moment he continued:

"I wrote Peter Sampson as I said I would and told him to cable you if the situation was urgent," (Rendall did not say that he had preceded the letter by a cable-message of some length and costliness), "but you must not neglect the matter, believe me. Reorganizations always need watching: and your absence gives the other side a big chance. I understand you have an honest agent——"

"Dear Mr. Hansell—he is scrupulous indeed."

"So much the better, but he's evidently bothered and nobody knows nowadays what may happen. The news to-day begins to look as if there may be an Armistice sooner than we thought——"

“Does it really?” and “Do let me look!” the two women cried, eagerly precipitating themselves upon the newspapers and George noticed that Mrs. Ashburnham gave him no direct answer. Evidently, she was not ready to commit herself.

The news from France was indeed encouraging and they soon fell into talk concerning it, and from this to those relations between England and the United States which interested them so deeply. What were these relations, in reality? Was the War leading to a better understanding? Rendall thought so: Mrs. Ashburnham was very doubtful. Were the States at all conscious of the depth and extent of England's effort to comprehend them—or of the shift it had caused in her habits and fixed ideas?

For England, since 1914, the universe had turned on a new pivot. The financial centre of the banking world had moved from London to New York with all the shift in relative power which such a change involved. The centre of all smartness and gayety, of all luxury and chic, had also shifted from Paris to New York. All those Americans who previously had made their homes in Paris because it was the smart social thing to do, or had taken houses in the Shires because it was the smart sporting thing to do—were clamoring to come home again, because that was now the smart place to be. A

vast alteration in relative importance had taken place; a profound sense of insecurity permeated Europe, the attention of the leisure classes was fixed on the least exhausted country, the one where they, personally, were least likely to suffer. The reaction of Europe on the American which had been the theme of so many novelists, had become overnight the reaction of America on the European. Temporary, evanescent even as this was likely to be, it was a reaction likely to have a profound effect upon civilization, the social significance of which was yet hidden from the observer. George and Mildred were hardly even observers, and Mrs. Ashburnham, as her style was, felt rather than reasoned about these things. The talk between them, therefore, was direct and naif, according to their lights. "All these people know where the money's going to be for the next fifty years," Rendall commented; "it's not going to be comfortable or safe anywhere in Europe. That's why I want you to come home, Mrs. Ashburnham—the world is bound to have an awful headache after all this."

"Perhaps that's why I ought to stay," she answered steadily.

"But you couldn't help any," said George gently; "it doesn't depend on the middle class folk like you and me—but on the two ends: the labouring classes and the statesmen and

Ambassadors and things. They're the people that can help. I see a new Ambassador to America, suggested here," he added, turning over the newspaper. "Some chap who's done a lot of good work."

"Oh who?" Sidney Ashburnham asked with vivid interest.

"Nobody I knew; but here it is," and he read out: "'Among the names suggested for the post of American Ambassador has been that of Lord Waveney. It is rumoured that the appointment is in Government hands and no word has yet been given as to whether Lord Waveney will accept, in view of the fact that his services cannot easily be spared by the Foreign Office. Lord Waveney was raised to the Peerage last year. He will be remembered as Mr. Adrian Romeyne, one of the most brilliant diplomats in the Liberal Party, who has been entrusted with some of the most delicate and difficult missions during the War. He is a widower.'"

Mrs. Ashburnham hardly appeared to listen to this information, but her face settled into a deep stillness, an abstraction so marked that George lowered his newspaper to address her.

"I wonder if he'd be any good—do you happen to know anything about him?"

She answered with disconcerting promptitude:

“Yes; I knew Lord Waveney very well at one time.”

She stopped, and George, a little puzzled, ventured: “You think he’d be a suitable Ambassador?”

“Oh quite. He’s very brilliant—he’s really a remarkable man.”

“The same style as Lord Reading?”

“Not in the least.”

She opened the book that lay in her lap with an air of purpose which nobody could fail of understanding. Conscious of an unfamiliar vibration in the atmosphere, George stared out of the window. It was Mrs. Ashburnham who relit the conversation by asking him:

“In case I should decide to go home—a little later on, I mean—can you tell me what steps to take—how I should set about it?”

He responded at once with smiling readiness to discuss ways and means, to promise assistance; while all the while his mind was tracing a hidden sequence of thought. Just why, he could hardly have told, but he had become almost certain that Mrs. Ashburnham’s return to America, if return she did, would have nothing whatever to do with the economic situation of Europe or the hazard of her own interests. He felt, subtly but delicately, the presence of a motive more personal, a motive connected with the item of news he had just read aloud—the ap-

pointment of His Majesty's Ambassador to the States. Waveney — Adrian, Lord Waveney, George's inner self kept repeating the name with a marked distaste.

Their books, their talk, their luncheon-basket, caused the journey to pass agreeably enough and they arrived in London on time during the heart of a warm and golden afternoon. The Rendall's had tacitly arranged that they were to leave Mrs. Ashburnham at her address—she lived somewhere in Mayfair, it appeared—not far from Brown's Hotel—and George prepared at once for the struggle to obtain a taxi. But their plan was completely shattered, as events turned out. No sooner had Mrs. Ashburnham set her slender foot upon the platform than she was at once approached by a tall and very handsome, sturdy gentleman, not especially young—with a thin nose, grey moustaches, a confident eye and the authoritative air of knowing all there was to know.

“Well, my dear,” was his satisfied greeting, “so there you are!”

Mrs. Ashburnham bade a cordial good-bye to her fellow-travellers—the while that the tall gentleman, who had secured a porter, was himself superintending the collection of her effects. There was a good deal of confusion of luggage on the platform at Paddington and Major Rendall had all he could do to attend to his own and

his sister's bags and boxes. Notwithstanding this and the scarcity of porters, he lost nothing of Mrs. Ashburnham's departure, nor the kind smile she gave him over her shoulder as she turned away, the tall gentleman protecting her on the one side, a porter, heavily laden, on the other. George, also, had not failed of noticing how this group was accosted by another man evidently a servant, who touched his hat as he said to his master:

"I have the taxi—my lord—this way!"

The Rendalls had to wait for their own conveyance, but they said little as they stood side by side on the street. The end of a holiday is always depressing and Mildred's mouth drooped at the thought of the morrow. She, too, had caught the servant's words and had witnessed the comfortable departure of their friend in the decidedly monopolizing care of the middle-aged gentleman—nor had she escaped that slight disagreeable consciousness of exclusion which such incidents give to the sensitive. Of course, one knew the English did not introduce—and she told herself hastily that no one at home would think of making introductions on a station-platform—but still!

Once in the cab, however, and rolling along in the late, level sunshine, she heard George laugh suddenly, jerkily, to himself and glanced at him in dismay.

“*She’ll* never go home!” George said scornfully in answer to her enquiring look; and Mildred saw his mouth set into a grim line. For the first time she was inclined to feel almost sorry that they had ever met Mrs. Ashburnham.

BOOK II

WROXETER OLD HOUSE

CHAPTER VI

ON the same afternoon that Mrs. Ashburnham and the Rendalls were chatting together in friendly fashion while flying along to town in the so-called Riviera Express, Lord Waveney sat in his library at Smith Square, smoking and looking out of the window at the barges moving slowly up the river. His house spread all about him its pompous silences and formed at the moment the subject of his thoughts. This large and beautiful building in the Georgian style, of rose-colored brick and black and white marble, had been one of the "desires accomplished" of which the French saying contrives to communicate the full ironic bitterness. It had been built with his wife's money—the wife for whom he was wearing a black coat and tie, the wife at whose death he had changed his habits sufficiently to replace his white pearl studs in the evening by black pearl ones. His mind kept returning to those weeks when it was building—those weeks when he and she, at one for the first and perhaps for the last time

in their married life, had busied themselves from morning till night over its plans and details. The house had meant so much to them both. To the wife it was the token of her prowess, sign manual and visible witness that she had captured a prize, that she had married a personage. To the husband it seemed the first step on that stairway of ambition which he was determined to climb—fit setting for the success he meant to win and for those dignities which he knew such success would bring him.

He could have laughed aloud—only his was not that temperament—when he recalled what he had intended his house to be. First, he had planned a brilliant social life under its roof—the sort of life he had read of as occurring more often in the London of fifty years ago than in the London of to-day. It was to be the focus and the nucleus of an intelligent influence, of wit and urbanity, of warm and sympathetic hospitality. It was to be the gathering-place where clever and well-bred people, great people, and people who were going to be great people, were to meet and in meeting to start that irresistible wave by which he—the master and central figure of the house—would be borne high on the shore of political power. With his own unusual personality, combining tact with rare distinction of mind—there seemed no heights he could not scale—he needed only the proper background

—and that background could not be the mere dingy spaciousness of the ordinary London big house. Times had changed and more was required than Victorian furniture, Staffordshire pottery and feeble essays in water colour.

So Waveney had builded him a mansion of noble dignity and appropriate furnishing: with modern offices, with a splendid dining-room for those great dinners which were the crown, so to speak, of worldly approbation as for the smaller, intimate occasions during which its sceptre was wielded. There was a garden full of mauve and crimson rhododendron, looking out upon the tranquil Thames, and a library which was to confirm, by its quiet richness, the impression of his own personality.

“*Les désirs accomplis . . . !*” Yes: he could have laughed. There it stood, his house, just as it had been planned, and all these hopes had come to absolutely nothing. Its stately beauty and fitness had counted for naught because there was no spirit within—because the mistress of all was dull and disagreeable, and too lazy and self-satisfied to change.

He had tried his best to teach her but had finally given it up as a bad job: she neither would nor could learn anything about the world he loved. So Waveney, who was far too wise to struggle for his wish under the circumstances, had never given even one party in his beautiful

house. She had asked her friends, who were rather like herself, middle-class, censorious, unattractive people; but he had not asked any of his—and she had resented that. He used it as a lodging, because, unless one was so poor as to be forced into intimacy, it was well to go on living under the same roof with one's wife, and also because for a public man a house in Smith Square is “a good address.”

Then came the War, with its vital absorptions, and all social life sank into abeyance. Now she had gone; and things were so changed financially and politically, that it was growing more doubtful every day whether he could afford to go on living in a place which he had come to regard as a sort of tomb for his vanished hopes.

Although he thought of her now without bitterness, yet Waveney was not conscious of any feeling of apology toward the dead woman. None was, in his opinion, needed. He had been a gentle, a tolerant and a patient husband. At first and while he was still in love with her (she had been a handsome creature in her flamboyant way) he had given her a great deal of time and attention. It had seemed impossible that she could not fulfil the very slight demands of their easy world—where little is asked of any woman but to smile! His clear sight soon showed him that she retained the

tenacious hostility, prejudice and meanness of early surroundings. He knew that, had he been a shop-keeper, she would probably have made him an admirable wife.

When he found that it was all of no use, he did not quarrel with her; he merely withdrew himself and tried to forget her. He didn't make her life harder in any way. He continued, as she was a shrewd business woman, to consult with her at decent intervals. Moreover he remained, technically speaking, faithful to her. This was strange, perhaps, because he craved sympathy; but he was by nature too fastidious to take the passing consolation, which society makes so easy for a man of his caste. He made War and work his justification, but the real reason was one of temperament—a temperament rooted, one must not forget, in the austere soil of that same middle-class. It was true that he had met one woman, who—Ah! but that exquisite moment must be thrust out of memory. Yet he was glad that the thought brought with it nothing of weakness to regret, particularly now, when he contemplated turning a new page.

Waveney sat still, raising and lowering his cigar, fixing his large, calm blue eyes upon the slow movement of barges up the river, his long-fingered hand resting on his knee. His physical tranquillity always seemed to aid the clarity and quickness of his thought—he drew concentration

from his immobility. The man owned what was perhaps the readiest apprehension, deepest insight and sanest judgment in English public life of his time; and these qualities were the more constantly at his service that he never fidgeted. In happier circumstances this serenity would have been full of sunshine; it gave light to many as it was. Of such a nature one must not expect the fierier qualities, or the tenser impulses of partizanship. Waveney had a natural flair for worldly success, he managed all his life, except in the one matter of his marriage, to evade failure, to avoid error—he was looking upon the future now wholly from that point of view.

His meditations were interrupted by a servant who entered, moving softly and brought him letters on a tray. His master, looking over them, selected one whose envelope bore the stamp of a small coronet and opened it.

“Dear Waveney” he read:

“Laura Theydon has agreed to take the 4.15 train on Friday so as to reach here in time for tea. I have told her you will meet her and bring her down. My sister came yesterday. The glass this morning is still going up and all is looking well. I am just off to meet a friend who is coming up from Cornwall and I shall carry her away with me by the first convenient train. Au revoir, then, till Friday. How about this Washington business by the way?

“Yours sincerely,

“Wroxeter.”

The faint gleam of a smile came into Adrian's eyes as he read. Dear old Wroxeter, with his little stories, his amiable foibles and the ladies he never failed to meet at the station——! One's imagination beheld him bending his long, straight back over them and "my dear" ing them, with the irrepressible ardor of sixty-five . . .

Waveney folded up the note and looked at his watch; it was half-past four. He rose, took hat and stick from the hall, glancing as he always did with satisfaction at its checker-board floor of black and white marble squares, its ivory wood-work relieved by heavy curtains of gold and black brocade, its oaken furniture. After he had given his hat that indispensable last gleam with the little green velvet cushion, he went out into Smith Square—contemplated St. John's Church where it stood like a great canal boat anchored in the fairway, and began to walk along Barton Street in the direction of Dean's Yard. In Victoria Street he finally secured a taxi, and a few minutes later found him standing on the steps of the Theydon's house in Cadogan Square.

Laura Theydon was awaiting him. As a matter of fact she had been thinking about his arrival with a trifle more than the usual self-consciousness. Not later than this very day her father had questioned her, in his rough-and-

ready way, concerning her intimacy with Wave-ney, and she had answered according to her sincere belief. If only she were not mistaken!

The Hon. Laura Theydon was a tall, blonde woman of twenty-seven or eight, with broad shoulders, pink and white skin, pale, large eyes which were placid in gaze, a curved aquiline nose and a full red mouth. She might have been a composite photograph of all the English girls who had come out during the last century; and she had been as thoroughly badly educated as the ideals of her caste could expect. Her natural intelligence, however, soon caused her to appreciate that these ideals were a little *arriéré*, and when she came into her mother's money, Laura spent more of it on teachers and books than her family considered necessary. It was looked upon as something of a fad on her part—her father shrugged his shoulders at the books and the French lessons—but it was not as if he had to pay for them. He came of a group who still considered the least of their own pleasures as far more important than the education of a woman-child and who held that if a girl had a low voice, a good seat in the saddle, and knew how to dress, she knew all that is good for her.

The Theydons had never held office or been in any way prominent, whether for good or ill. They regarded themselves as having moderate

means, since they owned only one country-place beside the house in Cadogan Square. Needless to add, they were Conservatives of the old pattern, never read Thackeray, never dined before eight, and sent—or tried to send—their servants to bed at a quarter to ten o'clock every night. Lord Theydon expected his daughter to regard the Carlton Club as the most important and weighty body of men in the British Isles, and when she laughed at him for this, he did not like it. His own activity as a member of that institution was entirely confined to grumbling, but it is something to grumble from the inside. He was, so he thought, an indulgent father, and, when Laura grew too quick-witted for him, he did not thunder at her after the good old fashion of his grandfathers. He put it down to the pernicious influence of the modern Liberal doctrines—and he was patient with her, because he remembered that Waveney was a Liberal. He liked Waveney—who did not?—and had a high opinion of him because Wroxeter had: and Wroxeter was the beau ideal of Theydon and his friends—all vigorous old gentlemen in their sixties, who thought of themselves as middle-aged and were attached to a physician only if he were “sensible enough” (the phrase is theirs) to recommend a month at Harrogate instead of a reduction of alcohol. No one could have been

more conservative than Wroxeter, who still spoke of Mr. G. as though he were Beelzebub in person; but he always alluded to Waveney as a "charmin'" or a "brilliant fella." Such an opinion from such a source (Lord Wroxeter was the tenth of his line) had the utmost weight with Lord Theydon, who was only the third of his. Of course he did not expect that, after an event on the probability of which he had more than once sounded his daughter, Waveney was likely to remain a Liberal. What passed between them had been something like this:

"Damme,, my dear, what about Waveney now? Does he like you, d'you think? Is there anything in it?"

"I—I hardly know, papa—I—I suppose so."

"Well, I don't say I'd have any objections since you haven't seen fit to settle yourself before," observed Lord Theydon from the hearthrug, where he puffed and blew a little as his mood demanded. "Waveney'd *do*, y'know—everybody likes him . . . Wroxeter has a high opinion of him and thinks he's a wonderful fella'. 'Course he's not one of us—but then he's not a damned Radical either."

"Oh not at all, Papa!"

"Well, Liberal, Radical, they're all one to me, you know—but a man can change, under proper influence——"

"Of course he can."

“So I think you’d better make up your mind Laura, me dear, and get it settled—that is if it’s serious, I mean. I suppose he hasn’t proposed yet?”

“Really, Papa, I—you make it most awfully hard for me by this sort of talk,” and Laura’s voice showed her vexation.

“Well, well, me dear, I didn’t mean to vex you and ’course I understand—only—you’re gettin’ on, y’know, you’re gettin’ on,” said her father, and then, as he was really a kind old boy who didn’t want to tease his daughter—Lord Theydon lighted his cigar and turned the subject by asking her how she had spent her morning. Laura was grateful and immediately began to describe the spiritualistic séance she had attended in company with her friend, Claire Winstanley.

The name made Lord Theydon frown. He knew more about the Lady Claire than he hoped his daughter did and if ever woman deserved to be divorced——! But as she was the only child of his old friend the Marquis of Beauvray he had found it awkward to object to Laura’s seeing her.

“Didn’t know they let her come up——” was all he grumbled, “thought she took that stuff, y’know.”

“But she’s so much better now, Papa—she really is!” Laura earnestly assured him, “and

it's all the medium's influence. Claire almost never takes the morphia now—since Madame Charles told her that it drew a veil over her communications with the spirit world——”

“Hmph!” from Lord Theydon.

“She talks to Winstanley's spirit and is so much comforted! She tells me she has explained everything to him and that he has quite forgiven her.”

Lord Theydon's sentiments broke from him in a wheezy chuckle. “Explained it all to Winstanley's ghost has she? My word! Better late than never,” was his comment. “At the same time, the Filmers ain't playin' the game to let her run around town like this. Waveney told me the doctor said she ought to keep out of our way in the country.”

“Oh, but they couldn't do that, Papa!” replied his daughter with a Londoner's horror of exile, but unfortunately the name just spoken had returned her father's mind to a subject in which he was much more interested. He took pains before leaving to remind her very seriously of the danger of leaving that affair undecided, and of her feminine duty to bring it to a conclusion.

“If you let this chance slip, what with the War and all, first thing you know you'll find you haven't got an earthly. So take my advice, and don't you let it drag on too long. Awful mis-

take that—I remember some years ago——” and Lord Theydon fulfilled his sense of parental responsibilities to the extent of telling his rather uncomfortable daughter a long story concerning a lady he knew who *had* let it drag on, only to discover that the gentleman had married the governess in the meantime.

Then, very well satisfied with himself, he bade her an affectionate farewell and took his way in the direction of Pall Mall, thinking: “Po’ old Laura—’tisn’t as if she had a mother to help her along . . . and she’s a handsome girl still, though she’s gettin’ on to eight-and-twenty. No use lettin’ her stay till she gets a bit long in the tooth. And he’s been a widower a full year . . . Poisonous woman that wife of his, they say—it must have been a relief!” Then, pursuing the same train of thought as he mounted the familiar grey stone stairway, Lord Theydon fell to chuckling at the recollection of “old Wroxeter’s” phrase, when he had told them at the Club of having met his friend Waveney just after his wife’s funeral; “Passed him just now in St. James’s . . . He was wearin’ a black tie, but otherwise bearin’ up!”

The words, uttered with that twinkling gravity of countenance so inimitable in the speaker, had amused his friend Theydon—whom he never failed to amuse—and had made their appearance

in due course at Laura's tea-table. Irritated as she was with her father—whom she felt to be dreadfully old-fashioned about all these matters, yet she could not help the recollection rising in her mind that afternoon, when Adrian entered the drawing-room.

CHAPTER VII

SHE greeted him, therefore, with a touch of self-consciousness, of which he was immediately aware, while wondering that her eyes fell away from his. Miss Theydon was so seldom ill at ease. She turned to her place behind the tea-table, while Waveney followed the tactful practice of saying nothing until he had seated himself, studied her and felt the atmosphere. In an instant, Laura's *malaise* vanished and she was restored to her usual gentle and pleasing self.

In her low-pitched, lovely voice, she began to tell him of her canteen work and the experiences during the afternoon visit at the hospital. He listened, but also he found himself surveying her with a critical satisfaction. Her dress was subdued to War-time ideas. Around her neck she wore her mother's pearls (Lady Theydon had been an Easterly) and they were remarkably fine. He didn't like the jade earrings—because his wife had had a passion for them; but he watched with a mild pleasure her erect figure and the large, fine hands which busied themselves with making his tea. Disregarding her invitation to smoke, he sat quietly and

listened, his hand playing with a tassel on the arm of his chair.

“So we go to Wroxeter Old House to-morrow?” he asked her.

“At four-fifteen. Will you be coming?”

“I hope so—unless work prevents me, which it is apt to do these days. Who is he having there besides Bryan Allott and his wife?”

“I’ve not the least idea,” said Laura, interested, “hasn’t he told you?”

“I had a note from him—I had a note from him just before leaving my house, to say that he was going to meet some friend who was coming up from Cornwall. I wondered—I wondered who it could be.”

“It’s just a little difficult to keep track of Lord Wroxeter’s friends,” Laura said, with her charming smile.

“Indeed it is. But Cornwall now—what does Cornwall suggest to your mind?”

“Oh, lungs—and Walpole’s novels—and the old man who was going to St. Ives . . .” she laughed, but Waveney’s mind refused to leave the question of Lord Wroxeter’s unknown guest.

“Is it Christabel Morley, by any chance?” he asked, but she shook her head. “Not this week-end, I feel sure, but she has only just come from there . . . But does it matter so much who it is? We can leave her to Wroxeter and keep to ourselves easily enough.”

The calm assumption of these words jarred the man opposite not a little—just as it always jarred him. He was constantly encountering it among the people he knew and realizing that he lacked it himself. To him a stranger was always an interesting book, and yet he was reserved in general talk—a reserve increased by his unhappy marriage. Adrian would have preferred that Miss Theydon should show a different attitude, but he knew her and her world too well for surprise. So he turned the subject and told her about the number of Americans arriving at the Front, speaking rather slowly, but always with confidence. Meanwhile he was studying her, for he did not want to make a mistake a second time. He had married for two reasons: he had been physically stirred and also he knew the girl had money, which was necessary to a public career—and these had turned out to be the wrong reasons. The passion had brought him nothing, not even a memory, much less a child—and the money had brought him nothing but a house which was too costly to live in. Then, years later, he had met a woman for whose character and abilities he had felt a tremendous admiration and the very intensity of whose feeling had all but alarmed him by the revelation of answering passion in himself. This was since the War and before he was free. It was a time when no man had a right

to individual happiness, least of all one whose task demanded a cool judgment and undivided attention. Pain, therefore, renunciation and sorrow, had been the only harvest of that experience.

Now he surveyed a woman of his own class, cool, dignified and handsome—one whom he could marry knowing that such a marriage would consolidate the position his talents had gained for him. No one knew better than he the difference that lay between a family of recent title and a family which had borne one for generations. It was altogether advisable to associate the two, to bind up the new family influence with the old—and it was in truth the only way to make such honors permanent. The trouble was that he dreaded unhappiness, and, before he proposed to Laura Theydon, he intended to be sure.

“You are preoccupied to-day, aren’t you?” she suggested playfully, and Adrian realized that he had in truth been so. “Surely things are beginning to look better for us?”

“In France, you mean? Yes, indeed. But if I am distraït it is because I have had much to worry me. I am in fact somewhat perplexed.”

She grew grave, following his mood. “You mean about the American appointment?”

“That among other things.”

“Do you mean to accept?”

“I have not yet been approached.”

“But you will be?”

“The *Times* says so.” He paused and then continued: “The matter is complicated. It takes reflection. In the first place there is the Goat—can one take office when he is in control? If it were Asquith, perhaps——” and he made a gesture.

“Papa thinks him stronger than Asquith,” Laura said, bending forward.

“Your father is doubtless right . . . The trouble dates further back and comes from lack of proper competition. Why on earth did you Conservatives let everything go when you came into the Coalition? Why didn’t you stand out for at least one strong man in the Cabinet and so hold the balance of power in the Foreign Office? Bob Cecil? I know, it’s a great name, but he does not weigh the balance down sufficiently.”

“I don’t understand how we could help . . . ?”

“Think a moment and you will—and you will. One strong man demands another—the whole tone changes. The Government would have been forced into making some really good appointments. As it is—all goes to the P. M.’s jackals and how can one join that crew?”

“I see.”

“Nothing is more important than our representative at Washington for the moment. Everything hangs on it.”

“Then why not go?”

He drew back faintly impatient with her lack of subtlety.

“With *these* people back of me? To be made a scapegoat—or, if you like the metaphor better, to be ground between the upper and the nether millstone?”

“The nether millstone being President Wilson?”

“You have said it.”

“Surely,” Laura insisted, “you should be a match for them both.”

“You are very good but even supposing that true . . . His Majesty’s Ambassador could not be.” He added in another tone, “Besides, the thing has to be done in a certain style and I have no wife . . .”

“Would Lady Waveney . . .?” she was beginning but his reply was swift.

“Good God, no! She would never have done in the world. Had she lived I could not even have let it go as far as this.” He bent a little toward her, “Some day—if you’ll let me, I’d like to tell you all about that . . . I have been very unhappy.”

Her voice was low. “I should be very proud to hear.”

“At Wroxeter then—in the dear old garden—we shall have many long, delightful talks,” and then, following some impulse, a little obscure even to himself, Adrian changed the subject and told her something to make her laugh.

Then Laura told him the story of her visit to the medium, being careful to cast her narrative in such a form that he might draw the most congenial inferences as to her own credulity or otherwise. She described the dingy house, the dirty mystic, and the excitement of Lady Claire, and she dropped in passing, as Waveney was later to remember, the information that this excitement seemed startlingly like fear.

But at the moment there was only one fact which he noted. “How came she to be in town at all?” he questioned, looking gravely at Laura, who only smiled.

“That’s what Papa said—but after all, it’s September and there are such things as winter clothes! And she’s much better—in health, I mean. Why shouldn’t poor little Claire come to town and shop?”

Lord Waveney did not answer this question, and Miss Theydon had to notice, as at times before, that the subject of Lord Beauvray’s daughter produced the most unaccountable reticence in certain men of her acquaintance. Of course Lady Claire had “come an awful crop-

per'' as the phrase was, but other women had done that and yet men did not maintain that deep significant silence when their names were spoken. Laura knew her world well enough to know that silence indicated something worse even than unchastity—something belonging to the category of what "isn't done." It is hardly surprising that she felt curious about this; but more so—in her mind—that her friend Lord Waveney made no attempt to gratify her curiosity.

When he left the Theydon house it was past six. He went first to Whitehall and then on to the Lords, dropping into a quiet corner behind the throne, where he might be spectator for once. Welden was talking, fluttering his narrow eyelids over his clever eyes, and wagging his twyform crimson beard. The rest sat about with small air of interest in anything save the prospect of leaving town for the week-end. One noble lord rather frankly slumbered. Waveney became conscious of disgust for the flaccid lot. "The back shelf"—had been the phrase in his mind on taking his seat in that august chamber. He remembered who said it, turning her dark eyes to him with a smile, when she had referred to the ceremony of his "obsequies."

After a while he left his seat and gathered together a few men for an informal conference to determine their policy during a certain

formal meeting to be held in a fortnight; and then went home to dress and to the Café Royal where he dined with an American millionaire who had done splendid things for the Red Cross. At this dinner—Adrian recalled it long afterward—the probability of an Armistice was seriously discussed. The American's confidence was like a strong, revivifying wind—the dawn-breeze of an oncoming victory. The change was coming—it was coming at last. One could see it in men's faces and hear it in the ring of their voices and feel it in the movement which underlay all life. Many times they had hoped only to be disappointed; many times they thought the light shone only to see the black horror settle down on them thicker than ever. Four years of it—four whole years! But now, at last, today . . . the Allied lines went forward . . . the Americans were landing in thousands . . . the submarines were powerless to prevent them. The air raids had ceased . . . rumours of collapse were everywhere. That light in the sky was real—was growing . . . it meant the dawn.

The image stayed by him as he returned home in the soft, misty September evening. The dawn, and what would that dawn bring him? His thoughtful mood carried him once more to his library and to the chair he had left a few hours before. Simple and beautiful this room

was, drawing richness from the books which lined it and from a high carven mantelpiece. There were two lacquer cabinets whose exotic splendour gave him pleasure—and a few good pictures. A portrait hung over his head of an Adrian Romeyne who had been attached to the household of Queen Elizabeth—another of Jasper Romeyne, merchant in the City under Charles II, and one of that other Adrian, barrister friend of Charles James Fox, who had taken a firm stand for the American colonists. He liked to look at them and to remember what a race of progressive, clever men they were. He did not like to think of giving up this house—but though his wife had left it to him as their agreement was, she had not left him anything else. He certainly couldn't go on keeping up such an establishment. Moreover, if he went to America—but did he really want to go to America? He was tired—he let his gaze rest on the lovely mantel (an Adams piece, his own *trouvaille*)—and when he contemplated its warm rose and ivory tones, its dancing figures and garlands—he fiercely resented the money question . . . Of course Miss Theydon had means . . . they were solid people, but how much he did not know. As he rose finally, very weary, and snapped off the light . . . he told himself that when next he entered there he would probably be engaged to Laura Theydon.

CHAPTER VIII

WROXETER OLD HOUSE had been built in the reign of Henry VIII by a young gentleman of talent who had made himself exceedingly useful to Cardinal Wolsey. He came of good yeoman stock and owned enough land to support a knighthood and so make the most of my lord Cardinal's favor. This knack of being useful to the great and not too scrupulous in their service seems to have been inherited by his son, who contrived to become almost as indispensable to Burghley as his progenitor had been to the tremendous Prelate who had founded their fortunes. Thus the family rose rapidly in the world, outgrowing the beautiful half-timbered Manor-house set in gardens, which had delighted the founder. The first Lord Wroxeter, desiring state, erected to house his new grandeurs a huge pile out of the ruin of the abandoned Abbey, just over the hill. Herein dwelt several generations until Time brought in its revenges or perchance the strain of ability had worked out. Certainly in the eighteenth century the then Lord Wroxeter ruined himself at the gaming-table and put a bullet into his brain in

the dawn, leaving the whole complicated muddle to a distant cousin. Though he was both energetic and shrewd enough to save much of the estate, the cousin could not restore the ancient glories. The Wroxeters of the Georges and of Victoria were poor, obliged to let the Abbey to rich parvenus from the States or Australia, and to sell their Mayfair house. They had even found it difficult to keep up the Old House, which had been their original home, and which the present genial holder enjoyed to the uttermost. The tenth, and perhaps who knows? the last Lord Wroxeter, was a town-bred person, with lodgings in Little St. James Street, just around the corner from the Club, but he loved the Old House with a very genuine love, and sang its praises, though it had no shooting and was badly in need of repairs and of electric light.

To this lovely place, tranquil, smiling, set in emerald turf; its gardens yet full of flowering thistle and belated roses, with the Michaelmas daisies just beginning their bloom—Laura Theydon and Waveney journeyed down together on the 4.15 train. The lady made herself as delightful as circumstances would permit, but the train was crowded and their carriage well filled. If it did cross Laura's mind that her companion might have foreseen this contingency and engaged the whole carriage beforehand—it went to show how little she really knew him.

It was not a thing he would have done in War-time, nor had his title brought with it any sense that special privileges were his right. His love of power did not extend itself to cover these small personal ameliorations of the common lot: he reserved it for more important uses.

Unaware, therefore, of his companion's disappointment, Waveney gave a most unruffled impression of satisfaction with things as they are. He observed Miss Theydon's appearance with decided pleasure and at instants had a feeling of contentment in her presence. Yes; she was reposeful, she was thoroughbred, she was his own sort and probably he could not do better . . . Then his mind wandered from the subject, and Laura would notice his preoccupation just as she had done the day before.

Waveney had once remarked of himself that he had been born with the War. His present state of mind was due to a conviction—confirmed by that American at the Café Royale—that the War was going to stop. This idea caused him an odd, disoriented sensation . . . he felt the strangeness of the new outlook and was preoccupied by the effort to get used to it. One must, he felt, re-establish relations with one's own past. His conversation with Laura therefore remained impersonal and quasi-Olympian, and no woman likes the man she hopes to marry either to seem or to feel Olym-

pian. Laura was glad to think that other people should find his manner aloof, but toward herself she wished him to mark the difference, to look at her with eyes that stirred and were stirred, to behave in fact as other men would behave. He did not. Instead, he made an effort to ascertain her views on the future of the Unionist Party and her preference as to town or country life. Laura recalled that he was said to be quite indifferent to women, quite cold. Were this true, their marriage might have to be upon a rather different plane than she had, perhaps, hoped; she must set to work to win him in a wholly different way. She was not pleased, but she did her best. It formed an odd commentary upon their world that these two, the man who fully intended to propose and the woman who definitely intended to accept him, should have spent this hour together without a single intimate word.

At the station they were met by an ancient vehicle and a rationed horse, which conveyed them slowly through the lanes to their destination. Upon arrival, Waveney found an important message from town awaiting him, which necessitated an immediate reply by telephone—a protracted and irritating business. Tea was half over when he made his appearance at the end of the alley between the high hedges of yew.

The table had been spread under the boughs of a great cedar and the party gathered about it were laughing and chatting together. His tall host, by whom he had already been welcomed, had extended his long legs in a Bombay chair. Next him Miss Theydon sat, fresh as a rose and as erect on the stem. She was talking to the Allotts, Sir Bryan, dapper, small, fidgety; his wife, Wroxeter's sister, who sat behind the urn, and was a large, dominant person with a bassoonlike voice. Both of them were familiar figures to Adrian. The remaining member of the group he studied, carefully as he drew nearer, trying to place the slender, pale woman dressed in black, whose grace attracted his eye, as she turned her head. He continued to walk toward the group down the long, straight yew alley without pausing and could not have told the exact point at which he had become suddenly, intensely conscious who the lady was.

Lord Wroxeter pulled his own big frame out of the Bombay chair and pushed Adrian's slighter one into it: while Sir Bryan insisted on handing him his tea, with a sympathetic: "Too much telephoning, eh what?"

Mrs. Ashburnham, with her head turned away from her new *vis-à-vis*, whom she had not failed to greet though somewhat formally, was occupied in asking Miss Theydon the latest news of mutual friends—the Easterly family.

“Uncle Thomas and Aunt Ada?—Oh, they’re very fit, topping really . . . I saw Janey Lochiel in town the other day, she’d come up to do some shopping and was on her way to Easterly Park. Oh yes, Janey’s very happy, she’s become quite Scots and Donald hates town. They are all most awfully pleased with the baby—a splendid little fellow——”

“I know. She wrote me all about him and it sounded so very happy,” said Mrs. Ashburnham. “And how is poor Mr. Easterly going on?”

“Hugh? He’s *much* better though he was dreadfully wounded. He can walk a little with a stick and he takes much more interest in things—although of course he will never be strong. I forgot that you knew.”

“I was in Sir Thomas Easterly’s office as his secretary until last year,” Mrs. Ashburnham’s sensitive voice was warm in its quality. “I loved my work there. They were such kind, splendid people.”

“Didn’t you find them just a bit conventional and boring?”

“Not a bit.”

Miss Theydon’s glance rested on her in surprise. She had often heard before this of Sir Thomas Easterly’s American secretary, with her system, her tact and her remarkable flair for matters political. What she had heard of Sidney Lea’s romantic career, crowned by a

marriage to one of the most brilliant men in the Army had led her to expect a fascinatingly unconventional sort of person. Certainly the last thing she expected was to find this quiet woman, who spoke of her work with enthusiasm and of her stiff-necked and old-fashioned employer with admiring affection. Could it be possible that she had really liked being a secretary and had *not*, as Miss Theydon and her sort naturally inferred, regarded it as a mere means to the serious end of every woman's life—marriage? If so, how very American!

Meanwhile her host had started on a characteristic anecdote concerning a lady he knew, who had found her husband “toying with a charmer” and flew into such a rage that she “positively didn’t utter!” His sister was half-laughing and half-frowning at him—knowing where—if once well started—he was likely to bring up, while she supplied her husband with another cup of sustaining tea. The vanishing sun sent a few last shafts between the cedar boughs, and touched with gold the yew walls forming a green room all around them. Wave-ney laid his hat upon his knee and turned his eyes to meet Mrs. Ashburnham’s.

“Still over-working, I see”; she addressed him.

“No rest as yet. You look—you look very well.”

She turned her head away to smile an answer to some compliment of Wroxeter's: it was evident she was a great favourite there. Adrian tried not to stare at her. What an indescribable change the year had wrought! The deferential secretary—whose steady gaze had followed everything he said with such interest . . . the immature girl by whose intensity of feeling at the time he had been so utterly swept away, where was she? This woman whose delicate pallor gave her a look, beside the rosy English faces, of being etched in black and white—was a personality of poise and finish as well as of distinguished charm. Her voice was the same: he noticed that if less beautiful in timbre than the other voices, it had less monotony and more colour and warmth. Her manner was as quietly aloof as his own (he could not know, of course, that it had been modelled on his own); and when she addressed him it was as woman of the world speaking to man of the world. Her poise unwittingly annoyed him, he wanted to disturb it. He leaned across the arm of his chair to claim her attention, but she gave him no opening . . . Wroxeter's little story had called forth from her one in negro dialect, which she told admirably, while Sir Bryan was saying, "Very good—ah quite!" with that interior slow gurgle which was his nearest approach to a laugh. Waveney was by

training infinitely patient: he waited. After a time——

“You see I was right about your countrymen. I said they would turn the tide.”

This time he was rewarded, she turned to him a face vividly lighted.

“I remember that you did and it is true. Ah, they are splendid . . . In Cornwall—where I have been spending this last fortnight, I met an officer from home and his sister and we became great friends. No one could be more serious about the work ahead than he.”

“They all are. They are the most terrible Army in the world,” he rejoined; “my only fear is lest the Germans realize it too soon.”

“How do you mean—too soon?”

He put his lips together. “We have cause to dread a collapse from the inside—which most people do not realize. Our private news is that it is near—that it is near. If the political collapse should come before the military—it might unloose the forces which many of us are dreading at this moment—more than the German.”

“You mean the Bolsheviks?”

“You know the economic situation in France and here—and the strain we are under?”

“I know . . . The American officer I spoke of had noticed it.”

“It is getting—it is getting very perceptible. If they can hang out until we beat them de-

cisively on the field—then we might be able to keep them in hand—and incidentally our people here. But if their Government collapses, their Social Democrats will of course get the upper hand, and then our Social Democrats . . .”

He was fully launched now, talking, explaining in the old way. How delicious to fix one's eyes on her responsive face and feel the current of one's ideas flow freely, easily into words! And how well he was expressing himself—all that sense of dull staleness had disappeared. He was a little conscious of an unwonted eagerness of speech—a nervous hurry to get out all these ideas which he must talk over with her. . . . There was so little time . . . only four days! He talked on until he noticed that a faint flicker of amusement had touched her eyelids; and became aware that the others had risen, that Wroxeter was saying something about the walled fruit, and that Laura Theydon was looking far from pleased. The servants were carrying the tea-equipage into the house.

“Aren't you going to show me the rest of the garden?” Laura was asking. Her voice recalled him as to a duty. He stepped back to her side with that little quiver of nervous tension of which the last weeks had made him so disagreeably familiar, and which was the effect of overwork upon any interruption to his

thought. Mrs. Ashburnham had strolled off with Sir Bryan beside her. "So it wasn't Christabel Morley or any one in that set after all," Miss Theydon observed, as they followed more slowly. "You knew this lady before, didn't you? Is she interesting?"

"Very able," Waveney replied with a most satisfactory degree of indifference.

CHAPTER IX

LORD WROXETER in his youth had been one of those personages whose power to defy the laws of health had constituted one of the marvelous commonplaces of the Victorian era. Although even in his twenties he regarded himself as a pillar of Church and State, yet he had never in his life denied himself anything he wanted. Years had modified the sum of those desires and compared to many of his kind he did not ask so much of life after all; only a regular (and sufficient) income, a life planned out with exactitude for months ahead—London as a permanent home, but plenty of week-ends in the country—"some shootin'"—many little dinners with lovely ladies smiling at him—the Chairmanship of the Carlton Club—and a daily allowance of alcohol which would put an average man into his grave in a year. Lord Wroxeter was quick of wit, amusing and kind: it had been wholly out of kindness that he had first sought out the widow of that brilliant soldier who came of a cadet branch of his house. He had envied and admired Harry Asburnham and the attention seemed to him a duty. Virtue has its own reward, for instead of finding the

lady, as he had confidently expected, rather limited and perfectly tiresome—she turned out to be a “charmer”—to use his own word. Lord Wroxeter therefore, proceeded to take up Mrs. Ashburnham with an amount of enthusiasm which might easily have been misleading to a woman of another type. It did not mislead Sidney for an instant, but it profoundly amused her. His good looks, his gallant speeches, his dropped *gs* and Victorian phrases, his anecdotes *à la mode d’Edouard VII*, all these delighted her rather special literary taste. Nor did she fail to penetrate below them, to appreciate his qualities of shrewdness and sane judgment, and to realize that his friendship, once gained, was loyal and true. These characteristics were oddly contradictory of certain others so that, as Sir Bryan Allott put it: “Poor old Wrox! He’s always tryin’ to keep on bein’ friends with the lady he’s stopped makin’ love to—and sufferin’ from it.”

Life seems continually bent on forcing its inconsistencies upon its true student. Had anyone told Sidney Ashburnham during her New England upbringing that she should come to regard this lovable voluptuary with affection and what amounted to indulgence, she would have indignantly denied it, yet it was true. He stood as much for an era that was past as a specimen in a museum and she looked on him with the

same sort of compassionate and friendly interest as one accords such a specimen. The present society was not his society; the newly ennobled, Liberal, business Peer was not his sort of aristocrat and this world, occupied with considering the proletariat, was not his world. He was as surely doomed as the butterfly Sidney saw clinging with its velvet wings to the sunny wall of his fruit-garden—doomed by the blast of a coming economic winter, which he and his like were not fitted to survive. Such at least, she knew to be Waveney's opinion and the reason underlying his incessant activity—this justification of one's existence by belonging to the future. And Wroxeter belonged to the past.

She thought of this while dressing next morning, in the low-beamed, chintz-hung bedroom whose windows looked out upon the water-garden of the Old House. The red sun had hardly yet dispelled those delicate mists which had lain all night upon the range of hills. The garden in its composed beauty lay beneath her; beyond it the meadows and the copse seemed another garden, beyond these again, park, farmland, hill and dale, all England, linked garden to garden without pause. It was so peaceful, so beautiful. She told herself she didn't want it to go; no one would wish to go on living in a world where such things could no longer be. Waveney's anxiety had infected her mood.

Had they saved all this from the German, only to hand it over to the mob—the mob of which, from Coriolanus down, thoughtful men knew the fundamental, destructive savagery?

She had not been given a chance the night before, to talk further with him. At dinner he sat next Miss Theydon, and it was evidently the host's intention to throw them together. After dinner they had made up a whist-table which Miss Theydon willingly joined, so soon as she found that Waveney showed no disposition to emerge from the smoking-room, where he sat deep in talk with Wroxeter and a neighbouring Squire named Cumberland. Mrs. Ashburnham had been bidden to take a hand of cards, but when she frankly avowed her lack of practice, she had been readily excused and her place taken by Mrs. Cumberland. She spent the time rambling about the garden alone to her infinite content; although once or twice she found herself wishing she might slip unseen into the smoking-room, and listen to the grave voice and its balanced wisdom. She knew the others did not appreciate it: they merely termed it "Waveney's good common-sense!"

The weather remained almost ostentatiously fine, to everyone's reiterated surprise at breakfast. Mrs. Ashburnham coming in gayly had replaced her black frock with a white skirt and blouse, a white sailor-hat and white foot-

wear that struck the other women present as astonishingly slim. In this costume she looked like a girl, and her host delightedly repeated that it was "quite charmin'." Waveney too felt a stir of surprise at the light grace of her entry and he took occasion, as he went to the sideboard and helped himself to kedgerees, to compare her looks with Miss Theydon's. No: there was no possible doubt as to which woman was the handsomer, Laura with her height, her fair bloom, her intricately dressed blonde hair, would have been noticed as good-looking when Sidney would not have been seen at all. What distinguished the latter was intelligent sensitiveness and a moving quality of intensity that led one to imagine all sorts of delicious possibilities. Waveney sat down again at the table and tried to analyze it. She was more plastic than the other, he decided, and had a high nervous vitality making her energetic and adaptable. Just as she had been a sound and tactful secretary so she would be—if she had the chance—a remarkably efficient great lady. "That woman," her late employer had told him, "is a master-politician . . . I never found her once at fault . . . there were times, Adrian, when she reminded me of you!"

Was it this subtle kinship that caused his mind to wander constantly in the direction of Mrs. Ashburnham? Adrian was annoyed with

himself for speculating on her chances of exercising her talents in the great world. Was it Wroxeter who would give her this chance—and what affair was it of Adrian's if he did? This was no way to begin to handle his own complex personal situation—to keep thinking about this other lady! He was tired, he must be losing his grip—he would propose to Laura that day and have done with it.

“Shall we walk this morning?” he asked her and knew beforehand exactly how she was going to smile her assent.

There was a telephone in the Old House, but even before the War it was seldom used save as a necessity. Therefore, when Pargeter the butler brought to the breakfast-room the information that there was a trunk-call for Mrs. Ashburnham, there was a stir of commiseration. Bad news was felt to be the only explanation of such a desperate expedient. But when Sidney returned, it was seen with relief that her face was quivering with laughter.

“Oh!” she cried, standing in the doorway, “isn't it exactly like them and aren't they wonderful? That was my American friend—the officer I met at Falmouth and liked so much . . . Major Rendall . . . I consulted him about a business matter——”

“—Awfully sharp those chaps are y'know——” Sir Byran nodded approvingly.

“—And he wants to talk to me about it. He has had a cable, I think . . . May I ask him here, Lord Wroxeter? He has a car.”

“ ‘Course . . . ask him to tea . . . I love ‘em,” said her host, beaming, and Sidney vanished to give the invitation.

“Aren’t they amazing—the Americans—always telephoning and rushing about?” queried Lady Allott as she unrolled her knitting and the others agreed that they were indeed amazing. Sidney was still radiant with amusement when she returned.

“It’s so like him . . .” she reiterated as she dropped into a chair by Lady Allott . . . “he couldn’t understand the time it took to get connected . . . he’s been telephoning ever since last night! And he thinks nothing of running down here for half an hour!”

“No petrol ration for these chaps—they’re most amazin’ chaps,” said the serious Sir Bryan. “We had some of them at the Club and they told me——”

There was no shooting attached to the Old House and no horses in the War-emptied stables. But the gardens lay spread before them and the air on the terrace was as mild as midsummer. Wroxeter was glad of his brother-in-law’s company as he set out for a distant field, whose destiny for the next spring’s planting could not be deferred. He had noted with satisfaction

two figures—the man walking with his hands behind his back, the lady in a blue dress and bearing a rather superfluous parasol—who were taking a path that led toward the beech-wood.

“I’m jolly glad to see that, Bryan, y’know,” was his comment as they fell into step, turning toward the home-farm. “Let’s hope she pulls it off this time. Theydon gave me a hint and I told him I’d give her a leg-up.”

“Quite so—’t isn’t as if her mother was alive,” Sir Bryan rejoined, unaware of the high quality of his own irony. “Theydon wouldn’t be a bit sorry to have a friend’s help, eh? Let us hope she leads him to the altar. The first old gell was a horror, they tell me.”

“A rank outsider, my dear chap—one of the worst! She hadn’t an earthly—a dead weight . . . He staggered under it. Now *this* is all right. Laura has a tidy little bit, from her mother—and I don’t think poo’ old Waveney has any too much—d’you see. But they don’t stir without him in Downing Street.”

“What will the Goat hand him next, d’you fancy?” Sir Bryan asked; making use of an irreverent Conservative nickname for Mr. Lloyd-George.

“’T isn’t the Goat . . . he can’t stand for the Goat—told me so himself . . . they’ll be sure to give him something worth havin’—something we ought to have had if Milner and

Bonar Law had only stood out as they ought . . . Where does the Conservative party come in to-day anyhow?" said the outraged Lord Wroxeter.

"But he's a good fella and not a damned Radical . . . If Laura gets him it'll be all right," the easy-going Sir Bryan assured him and the talk drifted into the eddies of minor political gossip.

Lady Allott was a nice motherly person who spent every spare moment knitting for the men in the North Sea. Since America had begun to send so many soldiers she had become very much interested in America. She asked Sidney many questions. Why were the Americans always so rich? Was the country pretty? In which part of it lay the great houses and estates? Was the hunting good? The climate must be very trying—were the orange-groves some distance from those terrible blizzards? As far as Cornwall was from Scotland? What did people really think about President Wilson? She had heard it rumoured that there were *no* titles. If so—how very odd!

Sidney reflected that for four years past she had been asked these same questions and had never found them easy to answer. Americans always seemed rich because the English met none but the richer Americans. Parts of the States were prettier than others. There were

no great houses—in the English sense. (This answer never failed to bring bewilderment into elderly eyes.) There was a little hunting, she believed. The climate was changeable perhaps, but oranges were not grown anywhere but in the South. (This was stupid of Sidney because Devonshire and Sussex are the South.) As there were a hundred million people, there were probably a hundred million opinions of President Wilson. There were no titles—and of course that must seem odd to Lady Blanche. It was so hard to convey the truth by answers, and the next Englishwoman she met would take for granted that everybody in Boston did their own washing. Mrs. Cumberland had drawn her views of American society entirely from the books of Jacob Abbott and Louisa May Alcott. She was surprised to hear that one's Grandmother no longer read Milton as she mixed the blueberry tart! Sidney had the same helpless feeling as she had had when her friend's elderly housekeeper had assured her: "It stands to reason that the States would go with us, doesn't it, Miss? Along with the rest of the Colonies!"

She began to tire a little of this need of perpetual translation. She wished George Rendall would arrive. She wished, until she pushed the thought out of her mind, that the pale blue dress and its escort would return.

CHAPTER X

MAJOR GEORGE D. RENDALL, U. S. A., arrived at Wroxeter Old House about four o'clock, in a lean, dust-colored motor-car, driven by a Doughboy, whose advent raised the servants' hall to a quiver of excitement. The way he hopped out; the way he hopped in; the way he scorned to crank but simply touched a button and the whole brown and silver mass of machinery moved easily off to the stables—all this filled Pargeter and the rest with a sort of stupefied wonder. It was the first time any of the staff at the Old House had met one of these heralded millions, by whose help we were to sweep the Germans back again behind the Rhine. This particular Doughboy was young and vaguely Irish as to looks; with a quirk to his smile and a merry eye. His salute was quite astonishingly casual. He appeared to be chewing something which smelled vaguely of peppermint. He addressed Pargeter—to the cataclysmic sensations of that functionary—as “Say, General!” and when invited to come into the house, cheerfully replied that he didn't care if he did. His remark as he joined the group just assembling for tea was: “Say, you sure are dead stuck on tea in this country!” and when asked from

what part of the States he came, his answer was proud and instant: "From Persepolis, N. Y.—the world centre for corset-steels!"

Altogether it was long before the Old House forgot his visit and Pargeter amused his master considerably that evening by his account of it. The amusement exhibited itself in a series of subterranean chuckles, which were but fore-runners of the chuckles with which it was to be received at the Carlton Club. Those were the days when the Americans were still a standard source of amusement and no wonder that Lord Wroxeter led on the faithful Pargeter to the fullest expression of his surprise. "A most extraordinary young man, m'lord, if I may say so—and quite quaint. He addressed me as 'General'—but I take it that was only his joke?"

"I had to reassure the beggar," Lord Wroxeter always wound up the story—"He was afraid the Yankee was takin' him for Douglas Haig!"

Major Rendall himself turned out to be quite as expected. Reserved and a little stiff: long, thin, brown and businesslike—his figure and countenance as he paced the garden-path beside Mrs. Ashburnham, struck Sir Bryan Allott as displaying certain sachem-like and even aboriginal characteristics.

"Are they all so solemn-looking as that?" he

enquired. "One hears so much about the American humor."

"Which has, however," Waveney informed him, "no connection with gayety. It is an intellectual humor and as Kipling said, rather acrid. I remember when I was last in New York that I asked a police officer standing just outside the Grand Central Station if he could tell me how to get to Battery Park? He looked at me and said with perfect seriousness: 'Search me!'"

Sir Bryan appeared mystified. "I beg your pardon?" he said leaning heavily toward his friend, "a police officer asked you to search him? But—how very odd!"

Meanwhile, Mrs. Ashburnham had led her friend to a bench in the water-garden overlooking a pool where the gold fish nibbled among the stems of the water plants; and where, on the trellis above their heads, a rose or two still hung quivering in the light airs.

"This is pretty!" George avowed looking about him with the utmost satisfaction. "I guess this is one of the 'stately homes of England' all right, all right! There are lots of the show places I've seen can't touch it. I took a bicycle trip all through here when I was a boy at College . . . but the houses we saw seemed too big and stagey somehow to be anybody's home. But this is different."

Mrs. Ashburnham agreed that it was; and George turned his attention from the garden to her face and was some minutes in returning to the cablegram, which lay open upon his knee. In her white frock she seemed so young and appealing in his eyes; while at the same time he was distastefully aware that she seemed perfectly at home in these (to him) exotic surroundings—that she fitted into the background of this ancient house and garden so much better than himself or Mildred could have done. . . .

“Well, you see what Peter says here yourself, don’t you?” and he smiled gently on her; “you’re a clever and sensible woman and ought to need nothing more from me to show you which way the cat is bound to jump . . . You’ve simply *got* to get to N’York as fast as ever you can arrange it. You see what the concern is earning . . . and what’s your share . . . You can’t afford to lose all that; and of course I know you’re not afraid . . .”

“But they’ll never give me a permit . . .” protested Sidney.

“I’m coming to that—I think I can fix that for you——” he replied, “Anyhow, I’ll do what I can Monday before I take the train. . . . You know my leave’s up Monday?”

“Oh I *am* sorry!”

“Well, when you’ve got a job to do—get it

done is my motto. I'm chiefly sorry on Mildred's account 'cause she's pretty lonely in London——" George reflected, "London is a lonely place."

"Not if you're at work there," she told him.

"And then there's getting you off—seeing that it's done right. . . . I must say I'd like to do that, but it can't be helped. . . . The main thing is that you *will* go?"

Mrs. Ashburnham remained silent for a space—a space which her companion realized was one of indecision. After a moment he went on quietly: "I know—you don't want to—you made it sufficiently plain and I'm not the one to ask you why. I guess the reason is too—too sacred for you to talk about and I'm not going to—only—you know you don't have to stay—that is, if you really don't want to after this business is fixed up. If you want to come back here you can," said poor George, making a great effort. "It's awfully hard for me to see how anybody can want to—when they could be at home . . . but nobody can keep you . . . no Government or anything . . . you're an Englishwoman."

"The difficulty will be to go—not to come back," said Sidney, shaking her head; "they're not letting any Englishwomen travel."

"As I said—I think I can help you about that——" Major Rendall returned, "I've an

idea that it can be worked. It's not a pleasure trip, but it's to get the cash and I never noticed England to be a bit behind when it came to that. If you don't get it—they can't tax it—y'see—they're pretty much on the job when it comes to the dollars—as far as I can tell."

"But what am I to do when I get there?" she asked him, raising her eyebrows. "You seem to take it quite for granted that I can plunge into what may be a complicated sort of a business fight, about which I really know nothing. . . .? Mr. Hansell is an old man and not strong and he lives in Boston . . . certainly I can't rely on him for any advice. And you say that these people who are trying to rob me are powerful?"

"Laub and Haggerty? I should say so," his tone was one of sincere admiration, "but I think in this case they've been a little bit careless. Ye-e-s, as I see it," said George in tones of deepest satisfaction, "I think old Laub is going to get his fingers pinched this time, if Peter can pinch 'em . . . Peter'd love it. . . . He's the finest old sport, Peter, and you couldn't do better than Sampson, McClintock and Fessenden—anyone in N'York'll tell you that. Old Peter'll treat you right and you needn't worry Mr. Hansell or yourself either for that matter. . . . Peter is an old friend of mine."

"But there's the expense—and then . . .?"

"Oh you needn't worry the least mite about that," said George shortly, omitting to explain that he had already given Mr. Sampson authority to use his own funds on Mrs. Ashburnham's behalf to a considerable extent.

"Of course it's a pity, I can't be there myself," he went on regretfully—"there's nothing in the world I'd enjoy more than putting a spoke in Laub's wheel. He's a pro-German beast. . . . But since I can't—well, Peter is probably better than I'd be. . . . Anyhow, you won't have any trouble about it. All you'll do is just to sit down in a nice hotel, or make a visit to Mother at Hempstead (I've written her and she'll be awfully glad and so will my sister Linda) and see some real shops and hear Caruso and get rested up after all these months."

He enveloped her in kindly thoughtfulness; he was irresistible. Sidney could no more evade it than she could a wave of the sea. She sat uncertain, puzzled; vaguely wondering, vaguely remembering, while underlying her gratitude for the personal kindness lay the conviction that this man's judgment was right; his competency unquestioned. She had had enough experience to know these things when she saw them.

"If you think I'm laying a great deal of stress

on the dollars," George saw his advantage and spoke earnestly, "it's only because I don't like the look of things for the future—for any of us, still less for a lady living on a fixed income. . . . You may be able to get on all right now—but the purchasing power of money is dropping every day. There are hard years ahead for the middle people, as I've said before. . . . Any day you may wake up to find yourself in a hole. And I don't want you to have that anxiety. . . . " He said this so simply and naturally—his interest seemed so reasonable and friendly that it could not make her self-conscious.

"The reason I still hesitate," she answered him, choosing her words, "is because the whole thing is a gamble and one I can't afford. I always regarded that money as lost—so did Mr. Hansell—so did my father. The living in New York was too expensive for me years ago—what must it be now? I'd have to do it on capital . . . so you see? I do believe you know—and I appreciate all your trouble——"

"That's nothing," George hastened to assure her, "I'd do as much for any lady I know."

"Well—but suppose I went and failed to get anything out of it?"

"Can't fail," was his laconic reply. "Is that a tea-table over there? Shall we go over and

talk to that tall old gentleman who met you at the station, what was his name, Lord Waveney?"

"Oh, that's not Lord Waveney . . .!" she rose laughing; and George, relieved by the information, rose also and accompanied her to the shade of the cedar-boughs, where the rest had gathered. Major Rendall was put into a big chair; tea and cake were given him, and kind glances were turned on him. Wroxeter greeted him with an affability in which more than a trace of stateliness yet lingered, and told him that "you fellas are certainly toppin,' none better!" When George addressed his host as "Sir" using the same deference that he would have accorded at home to the distinguished judge or physician or any other elderly person of note—Wroxeter never batted an eyelid. George liked his fine, clever face, but found his intonation difficult and what he privately termed "the lingo" perplexing. Sir Bryan made it a point to ask him about "the shootin'" but George said that he'd never been after grizzlies—and when the other carefully explained that he meant "*birds*" George avowed a complete ignorance. Evidently there wasn't much shootin' in his country. He did ask Sir Bryan with politeness, "which birds do you like best?"—a question for which they all thought the better of him until they found he meant "like to *eat*,"

at which they all laughed and some are doubtless laughing still!

Conversation then languished, but the man on George's left, then took it up with an adroit question on a more familiar note. This was a pale man with a fine head, spirited and thoughtful, and remarkably compelling blue eyes; who seemed to know everything about everything and with whom George was soon eagerly talking. Although his manner was reflective and slightly aloof; yet he yielded nothing to the American in quickness and his mental touch alighted on the subject as delicately soaring as John of Bologna's Mercury. He seemed to know the States,—he, even, wonderful to relate, knew something of the language and yet forbore to use it himself, for which George was grateful. Rendall enjoyed him immensely.

But the shadows were long on the grass and he must start on his way back to London. He rose to take his departure. Somehow or other it had been passed about that his leave was nearly up—and the hand-clasps showed by their cordiality that this was appreciated. When Lady Blanche bade him good-bye, she spoke from the heart.

“Sorry you have to go back——” she told him, “my boy went last June. All right? Oh yes. He's dead. God bless you!” and George never forgot it. She looked him straight in the

eye and that's how he always thought of England—as looking one straight in the eye, because her losses were an honour.

When he thanked his host, George added “that he hoped to give him a good time in N'York, the very next time he ran over——” and his opinion of English coldness was very much modified. Vaguely enough, he had yet supposed that the Englishman didn't like the American because the American's ancestors had given the Englishman's ancestors a good beating! The truth is, the upper-class Englishman remains as a rule perfectly unaware of that fact—while the lower class Englishman half the time does not even know that the States are an independent country. If he had cared to ask them, George would have found that Par- geter, the butler, the cook and the housemaids, the postman and the village butcher, all honestly believed that every American soldier took an oath of allegiance to the king and that they were members of a rather specially independent colony, now, a little tardily, doing their duty. George never knew this truth—which accounts for so much—and which is impossible for the visiting American even to conceive of.

“Those are kind people every one of 'em,” he commented as he and Sidney strolled toward the motor car. “I appreciate it awfully, their asking me in like this. Lord Wroxeter's a

wonderful old boy, now isn't he? The real thing—every inch of him as anyone can see. But it's that other chap I talked to that knows things—he's a fine man . . . I didn't somehow get his name?"

She told him, but even then he did not modify his praise.

"Say—I just wish they'd send that man to Washington! It would do a world of good. We need to see a real Englishman now and then for a change ! Well, I guess this is good-bye?"

She put her hand into his: but said nothing.

"You'll write Peter Sampson right away . . . ? And you'll start about getting your passport as soon as you get back to London, won't you? . . . You won't leave it? I'll do what I can at our Embassy to-morrow. . . . And look here, Mrs. Ashburnham! get Lord Waveney to help you; he can if he will. . . . Good-bye, and . . . Good-bye!"

He dropped her hand awkwardly and got into the motor, his face set into its usual gravity. She saw him settle himself in his corner, and square his shoulders as the car started. She waved to him and he lifted his cap and kept it off so long as he remained in sight.

CHAPTER XI

NOTHING in life is to be counted on but the unexpected. On Friday afternoon, Lord Waveney had regarded himself as good as engaged to Miss Theydon—and his inevitable proposal to her as the *raison d'être* of the visit to Wroxeter Old House. By Sunday morning the proposal had not only ceased to be inevitable but had so shrunk in importance that he remembered it with a shrug. Marriage with Miss Theydon had ceased to be doubtful; it had become impossible.

September had apparently decided to be the crown of an unusually fair, dry season and each day at Wroxeter turned out clearer and milder than the day before. Saturday night was almost warm, and Waveney—not of recent months a sound sleeper—found himself early awake: his mind summoned, as by a gong, to the somewhat anxious consideration of his perplexities. He rose, dressed, and went into the garden, startling the furtive housemaids at their tasks. There with his cigar he paced to and fro in thought; more given to self-analysis than was his wont.

He could not honestly have told himself that Laura had disappointed him; she still seemed in every respect what he ought to desire in a wife. She held the views that were serviceable, ideals that were quite safe, a personality wholly attuned to a public man's existence. No: he was not disappointed: Laura was the quintessence of the expected. She had the sense of duty and the belief in masculine prerogative which most men (Waveney thought with a shrug) are supposed to demand. She had beauty, taste and race . . . her nerves were at the moment far steadier than his own. One could count on Laura; the dignities of life would be well looked after. If marriage were a question of nothing but dignities! Unfortunately it wasn't. It was also a question of deadly intimacy—intimacy which, even among a caste by whose traditions it had been ameliorated for centuries with every species of licensed hypocrisy—intimacy, the thought of which even in Smith Square—was deterrent.

She was not delightful—or was he too fastidious? Was he perhaps too middle-class—looking back on parents who didn't own separate suites of apartments—to desire to make a modern aristocratic marriage? Or was his hesitancy a reflection of the general doubt concerning the social fabric? Adrian knew he was more sensitive than most men to impending change. If

one were sure of England, of the future of anything . . . ? If the dominant class, which she so well represented, was going to remain dominant? . . . If not, what could one do with Laura Theydon? She had been cast in a mould, and it was not the mould of the future. Laura without the background of an "establishment" somehow ceased to be a personality. No doubt Adrian was quite mad to wish a wife who should remain a personality whatever happened—but so it was. The best balanced minds indulge occasionally in these extravagant ideals. . . .

Yes, that was it, he reflected, pacing to and fro by the lily-pool, in front of the bench where Mrs. Ashburnham and her American friend had sat the day before . . . that was it—the weighing in the balance of modern need, of an entire class, with its ultimate rejection! It all came to that—that Adrian was not sufficiently certain of his own future—of his party's future—of his country's future—to tie himself by marriage to a small, conservative class which he felt was doomed to failure and extinction. Now Adrian hated, dreaded failure. The future did not belong to the Theydons, or to the Allotts, or to the Wroxeters—or even to greater political families like the Filmers. He was even beginning to feel that it belonged more to himself as Adrian Romeyne, than as Waveney of Burcote.

One recalled a talk not long since with Moulton—that extraordinary mind—when the Russian disintegration was before men's gaze and the question it raised as to whether man must choose a world under the Germans or a world under the mob. If the Germans were making the last frantic, desperate, bloody struggle of the older order against the new—surely, Fate had shown an appalling subtlety—when it had enlisted *England* on behalf of the new! The result must lie between the Americanization of Europe or mob-rule—there was no middle way. Could one imagine Laura as Mrs. Adrian Romeyne . . . ? Hardly: for she was a production, quasi-exotic, and under highly artificial circumstances, adapted to conditions no longer likely to obtain. The man who owned such a production ought to enshrine it in a special cabinet—shielded from outer air by wealth and power. . . .

As his thoughts cleared, Adrian began to see how the coming of the American officer had not been without effect. He had impressed Waveney by his unself-conscious competency and adaptability. Things Rendall had let drop indicated a spiritual and mental upheaval in his home as great as England's had been. . . . Their two countries would hold the world between them—if they could only be brought to better understanding. Should he be named Ambassador—

this task would be largely his—and how did Laura regard it? To her an Ambassador was sacrosanct and an Ambassadorship was the embodiment of special privilege. She believed that the United States looked up to England. . . .! She considered Americans in general as energetic, amusing and rich—above all as rich! Was this the attitude of mind meet for such a post? He knew the misconception was basic—no husband's wish could change it.

After Rendall's departure, Adrian had strolled into the hall ahead of the others, to find Mrs. Ashburnham alone there, lying back in a big chair. Her eyes were soft and shining and about her neck clung a necklet of crimson stones. The quiescence of her figure struck him—for he knew her capable of sustained energy as no other woman he had ever met—and her langour at the moment troubled him . . . He came quietly over and sat down on the light fender near her. . . . His cigar glowed red and he wagged his long forefinger at her to emphasize his points while he talked. In the shadowy, ancient room, she was intensely aware of his presence. . . . There he was on the fender! The memories it roused stirred her heart with pain, and as he talked she turned her face and eyes away . . .

“Your American friend pleased me,” he told her.

“Isn't he a dear?” her voice was warm, “and

so kind! I had forgotten there was such kindness in the world."

"Had you experienced the reverse since I saw you last?" He spoke a little jealously, but she answered nothing. He waited, then asked: "He wished you to return to the States?"

"There is a business reason—and he has almost convinced me that I ought. Do you think I could get a passport?"

"It all depends—it all depends. We will try if you are serious."

"I am beginning to feel serious. . . . After all, it would be foolish to lose a considerable sum of money—enough to take care of my old age just because I'm too timid, or too stupid to exert myself to get it?"

"You are neither the one nor the other. . . . And of course it would be foolish."

She moved restlessly in her chair. "I hate the money question," she cried, "it poisons life, particularly just now, when we are all thinking of greater things. . . . But one could do so much more to help! And he—Rendall,—fired my imagination, I confess. . . . There will be a fight—and against these pro-Germans—yes, I should like to try it."

Anyone else would have felt it necessary to shake his head and talk about carrying on—and the risk and all the rest of it—suggesting a doubt of this adventurous fire. Not so Wave-

ney. Her spirit sent a glow all over him; it was like a breeze from the open sea. She went on: "I shall consider further, but no doubt I shall find it interesting."

"You find life dull here?"

"Certainly, I miss my work with Sir Thomas. You know how much I enjoyed it."

"I remember."

"When Major Rendall first suggested this journey—it seemed impossible. I didn't wish to leave England and I felt that Harry would have disapproved. But the talk this afternoon has set me thinking about that. Harry did not know about this money and besides he was all for effort. He hated supineness, inertia——"

"He was the embodiment of action, always. If anything, he was magnificently rash."

Waveney's warm reply evoked before his inner eye that splendid figure. Few men had valued Colonel Ashburnham higher than he.

"Well—you understand how I feel. He would not like me to yield without a fight. I had thought that perhaps it could be managed for me, without my going across. But I have had another thought. I have had a long training with Sir Thomas and as you know, I have acquired a good deal of information about people, firms, trade and so on. . . ."

She spoke hesitatingly, but his mind, as swift as his manner was deliberate, understood all the

implications underlying her words. He knew very well how valuable, under certain circumstances, might be the special knowledge she had gained during her secretaryship.

“When peace comes there will be a readjustment of trade, and people in New York will need to know about firms and so on in London. Trade is the great bond between countries. It may be that I can checkmate some of the Germans—I can at least try. . . . You are laughing at me . . . ?”

He turned swiftly. “Far from it! You are wonderful. . . . wonderful! But then you always were.”

She laid her hand across her eyelids in an involuntary movement of self-protection, because his praise was so very sweet. “Only because I used to watch you, and learn.”

“You have bettered your master.”

“Do not say so until you see whether I succeed or not in my adventure. It may be I shall go for nothing but disappointment, and the vultures of Wall Street will pick my bones.”

“Even then, I shall not alter my opinion.” He looked at her with friendly steadiness which passed into a vibration of intensity, as their eyes met. “Your courage! I do like—your courage. . . .”

“I must try, it is evident,” she made an appealing gesture; “talking with the Rendalls has

changed me. Although I combatted his view yet I felt its truth. He made me somehow different . . . braver, more active. . . .”

“They all do. It is the terrible criticism of their world on ours.”

“I feel I cannot spend the rest of my life pinching and being afraid and playing safe. . . . Harry would have hated that for me. . . . And the alternative? To go visit his old aunt in Derbyshire and be sweet to her in hopes she’ll make me an allowance. . . . You should have seen Rendall look at me when I suggested doing so.”

“I can imagine it.”

“The Yankee in me roused—I felt it couldn’t be done so long as there is work.”

“You can have another secretaryship for the asking.”

“I’ve ceased to want it . . . The next world we’re sliding to isn’t going to provide for the private secretaries as the past did. But I’ve lots of ideas—and I mean to belong to the next world!”

She impressed him so much, so very much. Her personality—so spirited, yet so feminine; her far-sightedness; her words speaking his own restlessness. . . . He could not think of any adequate way to express his sympathy.

Silence fell. Shadows crept into the room and her figure was hidden in them. . . . Mrs.

Ashburnham broke the pause with a question relating to Rendall's opinion concerning the world's economic situation—a subject which she knew interested Waveney. He answered speaking freely, his mind clarifying all he touched; and Miss Theydon found him, when she came downstairs, still talking, still perched upon the fender.

“Aren't you going to dress?” she reminded him and Waveney looking up beheld her in her pale mauve draperies, and her fair hair and her amethyst earrings. “Bless me—is it late?” said he, and fled.

Mrs. Ashburnham rose very deliberately and went upstairs without an effort at haste. Had she followed her mood it would have been to defy the mauve draperies and go into dinner as she was. But she was not yet brave enough for that. So she vanished, and Miss Theydon stood looking after her with a certain doubt in her mind. No one could have said that the American had made advances to Waveney—rather she had seemed to avoid him. Laura had lingered on the stair long enough to realize that their conversation was entirely impersonal. Nevertheless, it had made her decidedly uneasy.

CHAPTER XII

IF THE American officer's personality had an effect on Adrian, the conversation just described had increased it. He had re-assured Miss Theydon during dinner by seeming less preoccupied than usual, but she hardly realized that the preoccupation was a more favorable symptom because it took her for granted, than an attentiveness which had its roots in study and comparison. During his broken night these ideas, fantastically transformed had not left him; now they lingered like scent and colour in his consciousness. Under the influence of these two Americans it seemed as if his carefully laid plans had been dissolved, broken, scattered to the wind. As he paced the garden paths in the lovely morning, he found he could no more seize and re-form them than the wind can blow together and re-form the filaments of dandelion-top which its breath had scattered! . . . What cord in him had vibrated to the cry, "I want to belong to the next world!" He, too, wanted to belong to the future which she and her like, with their energy and imagination, were to shape and guide.

Yet if this fact was clear—it bore also cor-

relations which he could not escape. If the Theydons belonged to the past, why did not he, Waveney? His future, politically speaking, had never been so doubtful. He had never been a friend or admirer of the Premier. The Americanization of English politics did not enlist his sympathy. If he had begun life as a Radical the wave had swept so far, that it had him left behind. He could not whole-heartedly rest in either camp. As things were, he did not wish to follow either Conservative or Liberal leadership—and to belong to the future, a man must make his choice. Up to the present, that choice had pointed to the former, because the great Conservative family, the Filmers, headed by the Marquis of Beauvray, were his close friends.

But lately, Adrian had felt disinclined to ask for the support of the Filmers. As to the Ambassadorship, he was beginning to feel that the delay in formally offering it, was deliberate. Probably "*they*" were waiting a little to see which way the cat was going to jump—waiting, perhaps for some special manifestation of his allegiance. If the War ended, the group in power—it was too incoherent to term a party—must be looking forward to strengthening itself for a General Election. The man who was standing out for Waveney's appointment, was a Coalition Unionist, by no means sure of his

own position in that event. Thus the Government's attitude towards the Ambassadorship was not likely to be perfectly disinterested, and there were men to whom Lloyd George owed more than to himself.

By breakfast time, this train of thought had carried him into that same zone of depression which he had hoped to leave behind him in London. He strove against it and was glad when the time came to step through the windows standing open to the lawn and greet the others who were gathering about the table. Later, when the question arose of plans for the day, he did not commit himself. Wroxeter, who went to church himself less regularly than he liked his guests to go, succeeded in steering the Allotts and Miss Theydon in that direction. Mrs. Ashburnham, pleading many letters, disappeared. A light shadow lay upon her eyes and they loomed larger and darker than ever. Adrian paused by her chair long enough at breakfast to ask:

“Did your night's sleep resolve all your problems?”

“No: did yours?”

“How did you know?”

His tone was almost naif; as he paused uncertainly, his hand on the back of her chair, and Sidney bit her lip. She replied composedly,

“You know, I have seen you before when you were a good deal bothered.”

“I want to finish our talk a little later,” he observed abruptly; but she turned away without directly replying and not long afterwards he saw her mount the stairs toward her room. The inclination was strong to call her back, so that he even got so far as the foot of the staircase—but his host claimed his attention at that instant and the chance seemed lost.

It was pleasant in the cedar-shade, once the others had driven off to church. Pargeter brought out the papers, the *Times* . . . the *Observer*, and Wroxeter was eager to talk over what Garvin had to say. Adrian felt less able to contribute than usual; he was tired, and his poor night had accented that occasional difficulty in concentrating his thoughts—which, his doctor had reminded him, was the effect of overwork. He always liked a talk with Wroxeter who, though a Tory of the deepest dye, had in many respects the most markedly independent mind in that party and could always give color to his views by the influence of a past and more distinguished political era. Wroxeter had never belonged to the school which holds that the first necessity of a successful political career is the ability to write Latin verse; his native intelligence gave him a shrewder view of

the future than was common among his peers. The only stumbling-block to his success in public life had been an inability to form habits of work—or to put it more accurately, an inability to discriminate between what is work and what isn't. A man who holds that August 12 and September 1 imply engagements fully as binding as a Bank-meeting to a Bank Director, is a man who in the England of to-day, is likely to be left behind. Lord Wroxeter was found of telling a little story of how an American business man of great influence tried to break up an August 12 shoot, because some business emergency or other required his presence in London! It was a tale which may have demonstrated the strange habits of the barbarians, but which had a tendency to re-act upon the teller. Thus, though Wroxeter had a clear head, a firm power of decision, a hatred of muddle, and was punctuality itself—yet he lacked the sense of relative values which would have made his party anxious to avail themselves of his services. In his own opinion, their failure to do so was inexcusable. Wroxeter's liking for Adrian was real. His attention to the younger man held a subtle if unintentional flattery. To-day, when he saw his guest seemed unresponsive, he sympathetically maintained silence and in friendly wise fell into the other's mood.

Privately he said to himself something like this: "Wonder if Laura's been giving him trouble? . . . Must give her a hint. Oh the gells! the gells!"

Political discussion, therefore, had somewhat lost interest; nor did Adrian rouse to more than a smile at his friend's description of Washington in winter, as "greatest fun in the world, seeing the zoo!" and his equally unqualified condemnation of the same city in the summer season. . . . "The devil of it is—that they all expect you to be stayin' on there—look most awfully black if you don't. So you get to livin' on their iced-stuff and cocktails—till its '*good-bye, stomach*' and you're done. Of course there's always New York . . . !"

That there was always New York, indeed, was a comforting reflection to a large number of gentlemen of Lord Wroxeter's kidney; who shook their heads very sadly at mention of Paris and consoled themselves with the thought of the illimitable hospitalities of Fifth Avenue, "where lovely woman is as fair and warm," old Wroxeter quoted softly to himself with a reminiscent smile.

Meanwhile Adrian, his black mood hanging over him, sat impassively watching the cigar smoke curl above his head and saying to himself: "This is what they like—this is what they are—this is what they expect me to be—good

God! the 'back-shelf' indeed . . . and I wanted it—I tried for it!"

What had happened? He had the odd sense of having been thrown from a perfectly safe vehicle to a roadside where the surrounding landmarks were unfamiliar. Was it because the War was going to stop? And that with the end of the War came the end of the centripetal emotion which had held the Empire together? Was that now to be changed and become centrifugal? He asked Wroxeter, who looked grave. "And if so—what, what? For if in 1914 we had India, Egypt, Ulster and Labor—in 1918, each one of 'em has sprung fresh heads like the Hydra. . . . And we lack the men to deal with 'em . . . you know where the bureaucracy has landed us. . . . As for Ireland—nothing could have been handled worse by us—civil war is inevitable and my work there has convinced me that the problem is insoluble for the present Cabinet."

"Quite so, dam 'em!" assented Wroxeter with the utmost cheerfulness.

"And they suggest that I—I, of all men, should go to Washington."

"Well, but why not?"

"Too tired," said the other and Wroxeter, looking at him with attention, agreed.

"Mrs. Ashburnham was saying," Adrian meditatively continued, "that, after all, such figure-

heads as our Ambassadors scarcely belonged to the future. . . . An American friend of her's told her that it took him forty minutes to explain to our last Mandarin what a Bill of Lading was."

"Seems to me we keep tryin' to please the States and not succeedin'," Wroxeter said folding his paper. "If we send 'em an ornament like that—then we hear such a tale . . . but if we send 'em a business man like themselves—they are no better pleased."

"Mrs. Ashburnham says it takes more sympathy and imagination . . ."

"Oh does she?"

A new idea wrinkled Lord Wroxeter's brow as he replied.

"Poor old Theydon!" was his inner comment and he turned the talk to something else. Now and again he glanced at Waveney whose long figure suggested an unusual degree of lassitude.

The soft English summer, which hardly seems to die, so gradually it passes into autumn—spread its gold about them. The blue spirals of smoke curled into the bluer air. Wroxeter, having disposed of Garvin's news and decided—as he usually did—that the other party were "swine," went into the house to get off some letters. Half an hour later, he became aware of voices from under the cedar-branches, in talk more animated than his own had been. He

strolled to the terrace and, looking, saw Mrs. Ashburnham's white frock in the chair he had just left. Waveney, no longer languid, was speaking with absorbed energy and turning towards her a face concentrated and alive. Lord Wroxeter went back into the house, frowning.

CHAPTER XIII

To reach Wroxeter Church, one crosses the lower meadow by the path which skirts the Abbey grounds until it meets and runs beside the Abbey brook. Rounded and soft are the hills on the horizon, often shrouded in a blue and mauve cloud, which seems to descend from the piled masses of mist drifting in from the ocean. These blues shift from lavender-blue to green-blue, while the autumn sunshine lends them a golden over-dress. Some hidden mystery seems to lie in the heart of this empurpled distance; the eye, lingering on its loveliness, suspects a towered citadel, or vast cathedral, its spire piercing heavenwards. From Abbey Bridge there is a good view of the Abbey itself, its unaltered magnificence lying amid the ancient gardens. For years now, it has been let to an Australian manufacturer, with whom, before the War, Lord Wroxeter remained on strictly businesslike terms. Now that two lads were gone from the Abbey to France, whence one will not return; Lord Wroxeter often strolls over to tea and speaks of his tenant as "the best ever." He looks upon the new brass

tablet on the church wall with a feeling as near to bitterness as was possible to him; envying the parvenu his dead far more than he had envied his fortune.

Beyond Abbey Bridge, the path leads by way of the village of Diggery's Bend to the somewhat larger village of Wyefield. At Wyefield House the Cumberlands live, pleasant, easy, dull people, useful to make up a bridge table. They seldom went to town and Lord Wroxeter's comings and goings constituted the chief event of their lives. They always speak of the long-vanished Countess as "poor, dear Sylvia Wroxeter," but it is extremely doubtful if they ever ventured to call her that in life. The vicar of the parish was their cousin—although the living belonged to the Abbey—and the church—a restored building neither new nor old, stood at their very gates.

Miss Theydon, in a pew just under the pulpit beside Lady Blanche, stood, sat or knelt as the service demanded with that outward appearance of balanced gravity which was the indicated behaviour, and beneath which her thoughts roamed restlessly enough. She decided that the glass had never amounted to much—the ancient fragments being vague and faded . . . The vicar was handsome, but his voice was unpleasant—when he didn't caw, he gobbled. During the lessons, she examined

a half-effaced inscription on a nearby stone pillar and at length made it out to read:

“Under The stone at This pew’s Ende
Lyes olde Iohn Iohnes of Diggery’s Bend.”

Then her thoughts wandered back to her own affairs. It was a pity Waveney hadn’t come to church—one should always set an example, and all the more if one’s status in such matters had not been predetermined by a long line of Church-supporting ancestry. But Liberal peers were notoriously careless . . . heavens! if he should turn out to be a chapel person? (Laura soon dismissed this idea, however.)

This white coat and skirt with the thin black stripe in it, her real lace blouse and black hat were the very smartest things she had. After some hesitation, she had added her jade earrings—now she wished she hadn’t. What a funny, dried up little man Sir Bryan was . . . Rumour said that he had given Lady Blanche some trouble which might have been serious, only she understood them . . . Rumour also said she was the only person who could do anything with the Earl her brother when discipline was required, which in his youth had been pretty often. But even she had never been able to get him to remain under the same roof with “poor, dear Sylvia” for more than a fortnight running—although he had always been most

smilingly polite both to his wife and his sister.

The creed recalled Miss Theydon to another line of thought and she repeated it with reverent gravity, very different from Lady Blanche's booming fervor. Laura regarded fervor in church as out of place. Her religion was essentially Chinese, "the proper performance of the proper acts at the proper place and in the proper way," but she was piously unaware of it . . .

Certainly no one could call the Ashburnham woman smart! What was it about these Americans anyhow . . .? This one had no looks, she was slight and pale and didn't even understand how to make herself effective by a little powder and rouge. She wasn't clever . . . or amusing . . . She didn't talk very much . . . nor had she made any special effort to get Waveney's attention. Laura had never been so disappointed in anybody in her life, so she told herself during the collection. But then it was very evident that Waveney had met the lady before, they were already good friends if no more. After all, what did any of them know about Mrs. Ashburnham? Only that Lord Wroxeter had taken her up—and certainly that was no guarantee . . . she might very well be a mere adventuress! Wasn't there some story about her? Maybe she had some hold over Waveney, which would account for his attitude

much better—in Laura's opinion—than did her personal attractions.

Well, when she got back to town Miss Theydon would make it her business quietly to enquire around and find out about this—this interfering person. No doubt something underlay the previous intimacy, a something, which in Laura's mind was bound to be unsavory. Whatever it was, she meant to find it out—and from this determination, Miss Theydon drew a sense of power and tranquillity on leaving the sanctuary, which she strangely attributed to the influences of religion.

At the same moment that Miss Theydon was reaching this conclusion, the subject of it was turning toward her companion a countenance vivid enough, cheeks from which the pallor had been banished by the consciousness of the eyes that watched her, and a gaze in which the hidden fires burned brightly in response. Mrs. Ashburnham lay in a long chair and crossed her hands behind her head so the soft lace of her sleeves fell away from her slender wrists. She turned her face often to the wide, pale sky, which was invaded by a slow-moving cohort of clouds. As for Waveney, he talked and talked—he was borne along as by a resistless stream and it seemed to him as though he had been silent for months. He talked about the coming peace, what was hoped from it and what dreaded

—about the men who would decide its trend and what he knew and distrusted in their characters. He talked about the hope of an Anglo-Saxon federation, an alliance of strong and enlightened states which would hold the peace of the world inviolate . . . He talked of the old civilization and the new—of Power *vs.* Perfection. He talked about the great American experiment and how for one hundred and forty years it had succeeded because of its sheer intellectual conception: and of how he saw in the modern, more Europeanized American a tendency to shrink from the steadfast moderation of that conception and subject the structure of his legislation to the corroding influence of sheer sentimentalism. Did Mrs. Ashburnham think that was due to the rising power of women—or to the preponderance of the Slav—from whose political creed, founded in violence and tenderness, no stable good had ever come? . . . Mrs. Ashburnham did not know . . . but she wished to ask him how, when the collective life subsided and the individual life once more rose to reclaim its rights, these centrifugal forces which the War had loosed were to be held from rending the world asunder. “Only,” he answered her, “by enlarging that middle zone—the zone of obedience to the unenforceable . . .” And he went on to explain his theory that government consisted in its essence, of

three zones: the zone of positive law at one end, the zone of positive freedom at the other—and in the centre the zone of obedience to the unenforceable . . . and that the civilization of any country was determined by the extent of this middle zone . . . Then he drifted from these generalizations to the question of his own work, his own future . . . and she asked him rather bluntly if he were not tending to join the Conservative party. His answer amused her:

“ . . . Join them? Join what? They have no more policy than a crowd on a wet day—whose one purpose in common is that they all hold up their umbrellas!”

“And for you there is no shelter under their umbrellas?”

Her readiness delighted him . . . and, as they talked, his own revolt and distaste became the plainer to him as also the reason why he struggled against it.

“Politics welcome the intelligent man—but neither in your country or mine is the politician, nourished on the phrase of the moment, going to submit his theories to an acid so corrosive as the intellect!”

“Has he ever done so?—not in history.”

“You are right . . . you are right of course. One must abandon thought or one will become merely disconcerting and our people hate to be disconcerted. I shall give up thinking!”

“If you can.”

“Do you remember?” he leaned forward—
“that day you spoke of my taking my seat as
my obsequies?”

Her voice was low. “I remember . . .
wasn’t it true . . .?”

“I fear—I fear it may turn out to be true.”

“Then I think,” she answered, “that perhaps
after all, I shall be glad to leave England!”

“But I do not wish you to leave England.”
He spoke deliberately as he studied her face
over the tip of his cigar . . . she was sud-
denly conscious of a suffocated sensation, like
fear . . . but meeting his eyes she was able
to reply with steadiness:

“Why not . . . ? Everything you say
inclines me to do so . . .”

“You have not convinced me that it is wise
—this wild-goose chase, whatever your friend
Rendall may say—and I do not want you to go
away just when I most need my friend.”

“But—are we friends?”

The turn of her eye in the socket and the
quiver of her face were beautiful in themselves
and held him tongue-tied, though her words gave
him a shock. Certainly, she had changed. Had
he made a remark so flattering to the girl who
sat at a desk in Sir Thomas Easterly’s room
in Charles Street—how her eyes would have
glowed with the delight of hero-worship! That

hero-worship had been intensely inspiring, for months had preoccupied and deliciously worried him—until the breath of circumstance had caused it to flame into passion. He could never forget that for an instant he had held this woman in his arms—although neither could he forget that he had put her away from him and from danger because of him. Manlike, the past was a tie in his mind—and he had looked to find the same realization in hers . . . But this “*Are we friends?*” savored rather of hostility . . . After a pause he said:

“I believed—I hoped we were.”

“Then,” and Mrs. Ashburnham’s voice had recovered a certain silkeness, “you will be glad to have me better off, I should think. We agreed that a secretaryship was out of the question——”

“I assented only because you said so.”

“A woman should not work too long . . . it is deadening . . . It will be better to try my fortunes in my own land and make my friends there.”

“Major Rendall, for example?” Adrian was surprised at the sudden impulse which caused the question . . . but his nerves this morning were not normal. Her voice was coldly even.

“Probably,” she answered, and he came near to feeling actually snubbed. Their eyes met and he read in hers the unspoken accusation:

“Were you not glad to let me drift away to a new life? Why then don’t you wish me to be happy in it?” This revelation embarrassed him, he knew not how to answer it. He was far from blaming himself, quite the contrary . . . no honourable man would have entangled a helpless girl in a love affair of which tragedy was the only issue. Yet he had not looked to find her so cold, so independent; it roused him to rare irritation, which was by no means lessened by his awareness that their talk had taken a turn beyond his control. To have an interview get beyond his control was an experience new to Lord Waveney and not very pleasant. Before he had time to recover the reins, Mrs. Ashburnham had deftly assumed them and with a political question that was like a flick on the leader’s neck, soon had the conversation running easily along again. By the time the churchgoers were seen strolling across the lawn toward them, she was laughing lightly at some anecdote of Lord Welden . . . and it was all quite smooth and impersonal. As Waveney fell into step beside Miss Theydon on their way to luncheon, he retained an impression of baffled uncertainty which was for him as disagreeable as it was unusual.

CHAPTER XIV

“HENRY,” observed Lady Blanche Allott severely, “your little friend Mrs. Ashburnham is charming, quite charming—but do you think it was altogether prudent to have her down for this week-end?”

The hour was just before dinner. Later that Sunday afternoon the sunshine had vanished and now a light rain was falling with a delicate sound upon the lawn without. A little fire had been lighted and in front of it Lord Wroxeter stood, erect and tall on his own hearthstone. Above the white oval, smooth and shining, his handsome head shone in relief—a figure full of meaning, already alas! grown exotic, a meaning that included leisure, dignity and physical beauty—things already passing or about to pass. His sister was no philosopher, as she sat there with her knitting, but she had abundant material. The background was an ancient hall, its low ceiling beamed in oak, the carvings on the fourteenth century staircase as fine as lace. Curtains and coverings were a shade of deep blue, like the delphinium bed lying outside the window, and the coals on the hearth sparkled gold and red. All this restful picture

seemed a little worn, faded, vague if you like, and even the sturdy figure of its owner shared this wraith-like quality. Beside the fierce glare of the world without, the scene shone with an intimate beauty, inevitably evanescent. Wave-ney, going upstairs to dress for dinner, looked down upon the figures in quiet talk, with a sudden depressing perception of all this and might have cried out with Faust: "Oh stay, thou art so fair!"

The question just asked by Lady Blanche had broken the pause which followed his departure, and the sequence of ideas was one with which her brother was, to his vexation, perfectly well aware. Probably for that reason he did not at once reply and his sister was forced to resume.

"You know how the Theydons are—old friends of ours and all that. He's been hopin' this would come off and it looked quite safe and certain. Now, on the contrary, I'm afraid that Mrs. Ashburnham's bein' here has spoiled everything."

Lord Wroxeter's face did not change but he murmured an "Oh my dear!" behind his moustache in a manner deprecating enough to assure his sister that her fear was justified. She gave a cluck of annoyance as this took shape by speaking.

"It wouldn't matter so much if Laura were

not one of *us* . . . and you yourself have always maintained that these Liberal Peerages can only be brought round by marriage . . . It seemed so exactly suitable! Who is this Mrs. Ashburnham anyway, that she should interfere?"

"You know, Harry's widow, my dear Blanche _____,"

"Pooh, Henry! What does that mean? Harry was our kinsman and a hero if you like—but that doesn't imply he knew how to choose a wife . . . Soldiers of that type are always falling into the hands of some adventuress or other . . . Certainly, she isn't missing him exactly . . . Why can't she keep her hands off?"

"Never knew a gell in m'life," said Lord Wroxeter reflectively, "who could resist a good shot!"

"Well, he oughtn't to have been such a good shot then . . ." Lady Blanche's voice showed a marked impatience. "There's something about these Americans—I don't see it myself—they seem perfectly sexless to me—but they are cool and independent! This one has never come to *me* to be guided in any way. I suppose our men are so run after that it draws their attention—then first thing you know, the man has changed his mind!"

Lord Wroxeter denied nothing in this speech except the sexlessness of the American woman. He interjected at that assertion a "Not to *me*,

my dear!" which was highly characteristic. It reminded him of another remark of Blanche's which had given him infinite joy to repeat—to the effect that she could not believe there was as much vice as people said . . . she had never been inside one of those places in her life! It seemed more prudent to smoke on quite peacefully until she had finished.

. . . "That is just what has happened here. Really, I think you should have managed better . . . She hasn't *seemed* to run after him—I know that—but——"

"She hasn't lifted her little finger," he said emphatically. "It's only that—though Laura is a nice gell, she isn't to be entered in the same class when it comes to amusin' a man!"

"Amusing—" boomed Lady Blanche, "really—Henry, you amaze me. Does a man get married for amusement—among us, at any rate?"

"Evidently not!" her brother assented meekly, but he twinkled.

"Then why on earth did you ask her down? It's you, Henry, that are to blame and so I shall tell Theydon if I see him—though I hope to heaven I don't!"

"I don't see why I am to blame because Laura couldn't pull it off—I gave her every chance . . ."

"But you've just acknowledged that you didn't . . . Laura hasn't the charm to compete

with the other lady. Besides you must have known that she and Waveney were old friends."

"*There* you are mistaken," Wroxeter said shortly and with finality. "I knew *nothin'* about that . . . I knew her as dear old Harry's widow and a charming woman . . . But I never thought he'd fall for her so quickly and I don't see why I am to be blamed."

Lady Blanche could not contradict his words, but it was easy to relate this situation to her fundamental sense of dissatisfaction with his conduct and she lost no time in doing so.

"I must blame you," she repeated. "If it were not for your perpetual softness where women are concerned, you'd have put her off a week . . . But you can't resist them if they're the least good lookin' . . . It's dreadful. You know how we all feel about you . . . Women have been your enemy all your life . . . If it were not for that, we might have settled things with Sylvia so that there would have been an heir to the place. As it is—well, I've spoken my mind before, and that's that. But you are always putty in any woman's hands—and have been since you were born."

"I think, y'know, she's goin' home to the States," was all that Wroxeter thought it prudent to answer to these accusations.

"What good will that do *now?*" said his sister as she rolled up her knitting. But the

soft sound of a descending frock was heard on the stair and Lady Blanche's wrath was not soothed when Wroxeter uplifted his voice with quite a new note in it to say:

"Oh my dear—do come here and let me see how perfectly charmin' you're lookin'!" as Sidney came smilingly toward the fire. The others followed within a few minutes and Lady Blanche was fain to receive what comfort she might from the fact that Laura and Waveney descended side by side, and seemingly on the best possible terms. She did note, with reluctant leniency toward her brother, that he drew Mrs. Ashburnham's arm through his own and devoted himself to her during dinner with all his classic gallantry. If by this arrangement Lady Blanche was relegated to her husband's society she offered no objection—Sir Bryan had been tranquilly bored by her for many years and was used to it. She lost no time in asking him—subduing her large voice as best she might—what there was to admire in the American lady from the masculine point of view, and found his replies as vague as usual on such an occasion.

Somehow, though Miss Theydon's jade earrings were wonderful against her pale gold hair; though Lord Wroxeter paid his compliments and told his mid-Victorian anecdotes into Mrs. Ashburnham's ear in his most affectionate manner; though Waveney's weariness seemed to

have left him and his face and words were animated; though Sir Bryan told them twice over his story about a parrot and kept reiterating to their intense amusement: "My dear Wrox., I always say 'There is no true dignity without *Perfect Repose*,'" yet somehow the little dinner was far from gay. A shadow hung over it, a shadow of impending separation which seemed symbolic of a further and wider separation and caused a tension and restlessness affecting everybody. By and by, Mrs. Ashburnham expressed this feeling, when she said hurriedly and even a little nervously:

"Do you know—I feel so strangely to-night—it's a little hard to define but I feel as if the War were going to end!"

Waveney jerked his head up to look at her, in a rapid movement unusual with one normally so deliberate . . . it was almost as though she had spoken his very thought for him. She continued half shyly:

"It makes our last dinner together seem more of a parting——"

"But why? Surely you know we're winning——"

"Oh yes—I know we are winning—but it isn't exactly that—the War has made an atmosphere, hasn't it? that we've all had to adapt ourselves to . . . Now there must be another."

"The old one, you mean?"

"Perhaps it is the old one I dread. I was not in England to share that atmosphere, and shall I feel strange when all this toil is over?" Her face was very sensitive and likeable, but she was not sure that any but one present understood what she meant. That one now addressed her.

"The social atmosphere will be different, of course," Waveney observed. "You have seen it at a time when people counted by reason of what they are and of the work that they are doing together . . . You think that will end?"

"It will end. Not only here but all the world over . . . All the strangers will go home and be strangers once more."

"England will never forget them nor how they helped," Wroxeter loyally insisted; but Sidney, half-smiling, shook her head.

"It is bound to be different. Who knows what will come after?"

"Surely Labour isn't going to make foolish demands on us?" Miss Theydon asked, turning to Waveney, who was privately amused to see that she believed there still existed an US, who could yield to demands.

"It is going to ask everything—and get it too, if you take my point," came from Sir Bryan.

"If we had a proper leader I shouldn't bother," the host commented, passing candidly to the ancient shibboleth. "We shall worry through somehow."

"Unless financially, we crash——"

"The States won't let us."

"How can they help it?"

Sir Bryan supposed they had millions enough to help if they chose—but was a trifle hazy as to the means.

"At all events," Mrs. Ashburnham spoke again in the pause, "you all agree, it is evident that there is this feeling. Perhaps I feel it more because—at bottom, I am beginning to wonder if England is really and truly my home."

"You are an English wife."

"But that lasted such a little, little time!"

Again, it was direct question and answer between her and Waveney, who had spoken to her as if no one else were present. The plea, the perplexity in her eyes were meant for him alone. The gossamer threads of sympathy which these days had woven, made for the moment a web, perceptibly isolating their talk. Wroxeter saw his sister looking anxious and that over Laura's brow a shade had gathered. He broke the invisible veil with a story concerning Royalty in his youth, which was really too outrageous to be ignored.

BOOK III

LONDON

CHAPTER XV

WAVENEY returned to town next morning by the early train, while Miss Theydon and Mrs. Ashburnham followed in a more leisurely manner at noon. Both of them felt relief to find their carriage filled. Miss Theydon, while impeccably civil, wore an air to suggest that, now the visit had come to an end, the acquaintance might as well follow suit. To this attitude Mrs. Ashburnham responded with the most steadfast indifference; her eyes pensively regarding the landscape, never glanced at her travelling companion. Once indeed, she found herself studying the contrast between her own delicately pointed shoe, and the broadly shod foot of the other with a degree of positive satisfaction. Again, seized by mischievous impulse, she longed to tell Laura how intensely Lord Waveney disliked earrings, and especially jade ones. But her face said nothing, and she replied smilingly to the only observation Miss Theydon deigned to offer during the journey, which had reference solely to the difficulty of obtaining a taxi at the end of it. Neither lady had taken

a maid—Miss Theydon abstinent from conscious virtue and Mrs. Ashburnham because she had never kept one. Perhaps it was for this reason, or because of her greater quickness and co-ordination, that, when London was reached, she had captured a vehicle and was seated in it some moments before the other had collected her various effects and was ready to leave the platform. Laura did not love her the more for this minor efficiency, which in her mind was due to Mrs. Ashburnham's having emerged from the class whose business it is in life to obtain taxi-cabs for others, and whom, notwithstanding the hypocritical rapprochement forced on one by the War, she herself both dreaded and disliked. The two women parted with courteous expressions, and the relief which was natural under the circumstances; nor did Mrs. Ashburnham think it necessary to offer to convey Miss Theydon to Cadogan Square.

The apartment chosen by Harry Ashburnham just before he set off on that last journey, was situated in a retired corner of Mayfair and looked down on a sheltered and sunshiny garden, unknown to many people. Both of them loved Mayfair, but could not have afforded to live there, had not chance thrown in their way the rooms of a brother officer, whose duty called him elsewhere. He had been glad to sublet to so distinguished a tenant and Harry Ash-

burnham had been able to furnish from the melancholy old house in the North where his boyhood has been spent.

The rooms, by no means large, were well shaped and faced the west. They were compact and could be readily looked after by the one little maid whom their mistress had been fortunate enough to secure—the niece of an elderly retainer, whose mistress had been her friend. Giddy had been the quaintest and most faithful of a vanishing race; she had taken pride in training Dora in her duties, and the gentleness of Mrs. Ashburnham had made a permanent tie. It was pleasant to be welcomed home by Dora in her eighteenth century mobcap, her skin the color and texture of a peach, and her shining brown eyes—to find a belated luncheon spread on the dining-table and to note that the whole apartment glowed with lovely flowers.

“They came in a box, Madam, which—seeing they was flowers, I made bold to open.”

“Quite right.”

“No card came with them, Madam, but about half an hour ago his Lordship rang up and said he would take the chance of finding you in at tea . . . Lord Waveney, he said the name was. It was lucky, wasn’t it, Madam? that I’d thought of the cakes at the pastry-cooks this very morning!”

Mrs. Ashburnham showed less interest in the cake question than Dora had expected. Her expression had grown absent and she finished her luncheon in silence. Afterwards she stepped out upon the balcony and stood there a while looking down upon the Square below. The narrow paths wandered among tall trees, with entrances on Mount and South Audley Streets, and one under a stone archway to the street where Florence Nightingale had lived and died. It was retired enough, a sheltered, green refuge—with an ancient church at one end, tall school buildings at the other. Sidney often slipped within the church to sit in the candle-pierced dusk; rejoicing in the peace of it, although she was not of the faith.

A constant chattering of little birds rose from the ivy-covered wall. On the green benches a few decent old men sat smoking and reading. A little Pekingese snuffed and scampered about . . . The sunshine caught the Square and Sidney's window glowed in it. Beyond South Audley Street, Park Lane roared with motor lorries and omnibuses. Overhead hummed an aeroplane . . . later, she would see it returning into the very heart of the sunset, whence one's imagination followed the ecstasy of that flight.

Mrs. Ashburnham leaned her arms upon the railing, while the school children released at last, passed by below. Her mind moved vaguely

among various thoughts . . . The school children had lost their rosy look in these last months . . . The hour of victory was near . . . London was quiet, breathlessly waiting for the end . . . When would it come? She must ask Waveney when he came to tea, but—was she really going to let him come to tea? The slow stir of her mind quickened—and his name struck her consciousness as with violence. What had happened to her? She had gone to Falmouth, still dragged, oppressed with sorrow and loss . . . inert, lethargic, seeing nothing ahead but years of pinching life—and not caring . . . Had contact with the Rendalls revived her latent Americanism—with all its sense of adventurous possibility, with all its restless vitality? Or had it been the visit to Wroxeter—the knowledge that life must be readjusted to meet a new world after the War—the meeting with Waveney again . . . ?

She drew a sharp breath, remembering pain. The love which she had given to Adrian Romeyne, three years or more ago, had been as young and imaginative as it was passionate and pure. It was the type of love that so often flowers as an unsuspected bloom in the depths of sensitive youth, founded on hero-worship as well as on a sympathetic understanding. Working as he was against heavy odds, lonely and unhappy at home, Romeyne had not failed

to become aware of it, to draw from it both comfort and stimulus . . . Still, the situation might never have resolved itself into anything more definite, but for a dramatic and terrible occurrence in which Sidney was Adrian's only confidant, in which she had acted indeed as his and the Government's agent in extorting a confession from that unhappy member of the Filmer family, whose vices had already cost them so dear. Blackmailed for vital information, weak because of past infamy, Lady Claire yielded at length to pressure from these two, pressure wielded by Sidney's strength and skill. The horror and distress which the discovery brought to Sir Thomas Easterly's secretary as it did to Lord Waveney, had suddenly broken down all the barriers between them, thus showing their mutual dependence, thus revealing each to the other in a brief moment of passionate joy.

Separated an instant after, the man had been overwhelmed with strong reaction. There was no place in his life at present for an irregular love affair—least of all one which threatened absorbing and serious consequences. The choice lay in his hand, for the girl was not a free agent and the fulfillment of the revelation must lie with him alone. Her sensitive intelligence and spirited fastidiousness made her in his eyes a creature wholly exquisite, not to be named in

the same breath with heroines of like adventures.

True was it also that of the two he was at that moment the less deeply in love, the more able to call a halt. Certainly he did so; he met her but once or twice thereafter. He heard of her marriage with a wince; but there followed a strong glow of self-approbation, that he had done no injury to the woman he loved.

What he never knew and could not guess was that, to her different ideals, his self-sacrifice was of no importance unless it bound him for the future. To her the moment had been as a sacred betrothal, and his withdrawal had been almost in the nature of a betrayal. Her ignorance of the world had been as profound as her training had been idealistic. She had looked forward, with a rapture of renunciation, to a barren constancy which alone should unite them unless life was kinder. She knew he wished to spare her suffering, but womanlike she wished to suffer.

Many months passed ere she became calmer. Everywhere she heard people talk of Wavene's intention to remarry in his own circle. For the first time she was faced by the cold and ugly facts of her position, under which passion must needs evaporate. She was young; her love had been expressed in but a single interview, it could not live on nothing, and he made no sign . . . Harry Ashburnham had attached himself

to her by every quality of friendship and character, and his proposal followed on his return from Siberia, late in 1917. They were married before the New Year and shortly afterwards settled themselves in the flat, where they spent a month before he was summoned on that final duty. Her married life had lasted in all but thirty-nine days.

It was of these days she was thinking as she leaned on her balcony railing in the westering sun. Yes: they had been happy; she had heartily loved and honoured her poor Harry, he was a rare creature. She had been grateful to him for his attitude of stimulus and confidence; for his simple expectation that she would make the most of her abilities. Together, they had planned the books she was to read during his absence, the languages she was to study, the reviewing work she was to do for one of the critical weeklies. All this had been brought to nothingness by the German torpedo, and when that fine, eager nature had passed into silence, with all its talents and potentialities, life seemed to Sidney to lose forever its quality of romance.

To meet Waveney again after this tragic interim had at first merely revived the pain of these memories, for he had staunchly admired her husband; but his unconsciousness of any strain in their own relation had also been a surprise. His interest in her society had piqued

her, and she was moved by a not unnatural desire to disturb his irritating serenity, to try her own power over him against that of Laura Theydon. How pitifully easy it had been to draw him away!

The new quality in his interest had not escaped her—evidently in his eyes Mrs. Ashburnham, a guest at Wroxeter Old House, was not quite the same person as Sir Thomas Easterly's private secretary . . . Very well . . . then it only remained for her to play the part, and he should look in vain for the hero-worshipper . . . !

Her first hesitation in regard to the American journey had been perfectly sincere—but events were shaking it. If Waveney's consideration of her had heightened because she was Mrs. Ashburnham—how if she became a rich Mrs. Ashburnham. . . ?

Sidney's lip curled. The English sneered at the dollar, but nowhere on earth was money so revered! She had better try to get all she could—and then—we shall see! Perhaps he might be further stirred—pained even. Meanwhile, he had said he would come to tea, had he—quite taking his welcome for granted? Sidney smiled a slow smile to herself, and after a moment's reflection, she went in to the telephone.

CHAPTER XVI

THE War Trade Advisory Committee generally held its meeting on a Monday in a pleasant room, whose windows looked forth upon the yellowing trees of St. James' Park. Sir Thomas Easterly presided, a handsome, vigorous, elderly man much aged since 1914, but whose ruddy face and straight back still bore witness to his placid nerves and unimpaired health. Next him sat Mr. Bunting of the Board of Trade, a jumpy little man from the Midlands, fussy and self-important and given to unexpected irritabilities. Grant-Forsyth, M.P., who faced him at the long table, was a notable example of the business Englishman of the new era, much respected by the House for his sound knowledge of finance. Lord John Filmer, who was the Chairman of an important Railway, bore an immobile countenance, and moved his pale head from side to side in the act of listening, which gave him a resemblance to a handsome bird. Waveney sat at the end and looked out of the window . . .

The day, after the rain, was softly misty. Very faint cries of newsboys came from the open space in front of the Horse-Guards. The business which lay before the Committee had

been disposed of in its customary manner. There had been the usual lack of information, which Lord Waveney had supplied; the usual hesitations, which Lord Waveney had resolved; the usual doubts, which Lord Waveney had dispelled; and the usual decisions, which Lord Waveney had determined. The Committee was conscious of having worked very hard, and now that its session was drawing to a close, rather welcomed the pause which was afforded it, while the Chairman "made a few notes."

These notes of Sir Thomas's—which he made with solemnity—were well known to his companions as a cause of some confusion to his own and their own minds. Since Sir Thomas had lost his invaluable secretary, Miss Lea, he did not always know what to do with them. Thus the words "Crude Potash" written on a sheet of paper and unaccompanied by any explanatory data—had escaped from his pocket at the Carlton Club and caused a brief excitement there; being held to refer to an unknown racehorse, in training for the Derby! This had rather shocked Sir Thomas, but he still held it part of his duty as an Englishman during the present crisis, to go on collecting these references. With his glasses very far down on his nose, therefore, he was occupied in carefully writing out the word "Diphenylamine," in order that he might remember in future the vital

significance of that somewhat cryptic substance. The Committee waited patiently for him to finish, and meanwhile one or two of its members occupied themselves looking over a sheet of names furnished by the Allied Committee in the States, containing those American firms who desired trade premits in order to complete their contracts in Great Britain . . .

Waveney took the sheet and glanced down it: "Steinmetz & Cramm," "Jones, Smith & Co.," "Laub and Haggerty——" The latter words brought a fleeting remembrance to his mind and he drew his brows together . . . "Laub"—wasn't he the man who was trying to cheat Mrs. Ashburnham? If so—the firm must be black-listed without fail. He would have a quiet word with Easterly about it.

"Now that's done," said Sir Thomas cheerfully, taking off his eye-glasses and looking about the table . . . "I think we may congratulate ourselves to-day on our clean slate, gentlemen! . . . Just a moment, while Lord Waveney clears up that little matter which we laid aside earlier in the meeting . . . ?"

Waveney, catching his eye, began to speak slowly at first, with suavity, but with an appeal backed by knowledge and judgment. The "little matter" to which the Chairman referred, was one of those little matters on which large issues depend. Brought before the Committee by

Bunting, he had by his tactless presentation succeeded in running counter to Lord John's uncompromising Toryism, Grant-Forsyth's ineradicable prejudices in favor of Banking custom, and Sir Thomas Easterly's anti-Home Rule doctrine. Bunting had come very near to upsetting the apple cart, which still remained dangerously tilted—the apples once scattered would be nobody's business to gather up again and the Board of Trade would remain peevishly inert. This must not happen: Waveney, as so often before, must come to the rescue . . .

His mind as he talked, applied its force here and there, where most needed, as a wrestler uses his muscles. First, the wounded *amour-propre* of Bunting must be soothed, which had been ruffled . . . Lord John must be shown that acquiescence meant sound Conservative principles in general, with the chance of a new adherent to that camp in particular . . . Precedent must be cited to Grant-Forsyth, with the plain indication of a middle course which he should himself and of his own initiative come to perceive and propose . . . Easterly, one didn't have to handle—one trusted.

Fifteen minutes later the compromise had been effected . . . Bunting had been recalled to a sense of his own importance as representing the majesty of British commerce; Grant-Forsyth had been congratulated on his re-

markably ingenious solution of the difficulty and was chattering about it to Lord John Filmer in a manner so open-minded as to cause Lord John to mark him for a potential political ally—Easterly and his friend were having a quiet exchange of words before separating:

“Thanks again, my dear chap . . . but you know . . . You’ve been to Wroxeter, I understand? Did I hear that Mrs. Ashburnham had been there too . . . Was she well?”

“Oh yes, quite . . . Any message? I expect to see her this afternoon . . . ”

Surprise was a primitive emotion which Sir Thomas never exhibited.

“Give her my love—*our* love, I should say, my dear fellow . . . Tell her I carry on but poorly without her!”

“I shall take pains to do so.”

He was released. Twenty minutes later, in the act of handing hat and stick to Dora in the hall, Waveney became aware of voices in the drawing-room and suffered the most disagreeable moment of a hard day! Difficult, exacting as it had been, he had solaced himself during a dozen interviews, in all their needed yielding and firmness, their alternate vigilance and flattery which must be maintained in an atmosphere of unruffled serenity—with the thought of the hour that awaited him, when the strain might be laid aside and he might luxuriate in the pure

freedom of being himself. His disappointment was almost childishly keen and there was a second during which he was tempted to pick up hat and stick and escape . . . But of course he did not: he permitted Dora to announce him.

The flowers he had sent were everywhere glowing in mauve and gold against grey tinted walls. Mrs. Ashburnham's soft grey dress had folds of ivory lace for its only ornament . . . How big her eyes, how warmly electric was the touch of her slim, smooth hand . . .

The furniture of the room was of oak so old and black that it could have come from nowhere but the Ashburnhams' old home in Cumberland. There were no gimcracks . . . No home-made water colours . . . the whole atmosphere enfolded one in delicate repose. She wore no earrings! He dropped into his chair with an imperceptible sigh of content and looked about him, while his hostess busied herself behind a tea-service of ancient Chinese porcelain . . . The touch of colour burned in her cheeks . . . Waveney was glad he had sent so many mauve and golden flowers—they suited the room. He was so happy in the pure restfulness of it that he almost forgave the other person for being there. Also he was surprised and interested to find out who this other person proved to be.

The little man, whose astute, timid face, narrowing from the spread of brow and large ears

to a pointed grey beard gave him the air of a converted satyr in a medieval print, was no less a person than Gervase Fallon, known by many people to be the best-informed man of the moment on the confused Continental situation. Born of an Irish father and a Russian mother; gifted as a linguist to that rare point where a man can pick up two or three languages in the same conversation, use them and lay them down again as he would a spoon or a fork; revolutionary at heart, yet conservative by temperament; too great a savant to be wholly a politician, and too much of a politician to be wholly a savant; this curious being passed to and fro in the tumultuous underworld which lay just beneath the huge activities of the War. So deep had he delved into intricate bureaucracies; so often penetrated arcana to find a carefully guarded emptiness unvisited by any Deity; so constantly was he forced to translate patriotic phrases to find their real meaning lie in motives of political expediency or private self-seeking that his mood had passed beyond the vague shadows of cynicism, into the total darkness of a complete pessimism. His outlook was so black that it had become a journalistic catchword; one wit always referred to him as "Mr. Gloom."

There was no man whom Adrian more desired to talk with at this moment; the very week be-

fore he had made efforts to find Fallon, but he was notoriously elusive and his usual address was a Channel steamer. To come upon him here in this quiet intimacy was certainly surprising. Waveney—looking about the room—began to realize why so many of the books and pamphlets piled on Mrs. Ashburnham's large, businesslike desk were concerned with Russia, the Balkans and the Congress of Vienna. It was of Russia they were talking when Waveney entered and he settled himself back in a chair with his tea to listen attentively to all that Fallon was saying in his flat, extinguished little voice. Russia—it was there the danger now lay for the world and especially for England . . . The battle-ground had shifted from the French front to Petrograd . . . It no longer mattered if the Germans gave in this month or next . . . Already the emphasis had passed from the purely military side . . . That was done and over . . . The War before the War was ended and the Real War had begun—the War of the Classes and the Masses . . . in which Civilization was to go crashing down the slide of non-production into starvation and industrial catastrophe. Already in Russia the Bolsheviki were stamping on the last feeble sparks of endeavor and order—night was falling over that vast, prostrate country, a winter-night was drawing on, under whose curtain

twenty millions of people were going to die of cold, starvation and pestilence. Already the groaning misery of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries was being repeated and deepened in that enormous section of Europe. . . . The earth was in eclipse and already one segment lay in a black shadow which was creeping on. Russia had disappeared: Turkey, Austria, were disappearing: Germany, struggling and ailing, saw herself desperately passing into the grip of that Nothingness and yet knew no way to withdraw from the impasse. France and Italy were showing signs of the disease in an intense restlessness: English labour was by turn violent and sullen, so that no one knew just how far the infection had spread—only the United States, still fat and well-nourished from her years of neutrality and plenty, stood firm. The disease was one of malnutrition and her turn was yet to come if it came at all . . .

Thus Fallon in his mild voice prophesied of horrors to come and Waveney listened, closely, attentively. He himself felt no such extravagant dread—and said so; disturbance of course there must be—but the English Empire and the States to boot formed a future make-weight that in his mind made stability inevitable. Fallon did not count on the Empire, evidently?

“No, I don’t!” the other maintained shaking

his head: "Can you count on Egypt? I am asking you? On India? On Ireland? Since you have done nothing whatever in Russia——"

"But we could do nothing in Russia——" interposed Waveney imperturbably.

"We might have," Mrs. Ashburnham came in. "I know what Harry thought when he was in Siberia . . . If your Mandarins had only had enterprise and initiative . . . he wrote you a long letter about it."

"I remember, and I brought his views before the proper quarters . . . But that was a bad winter, that of 1916-1917. We were stretching every muscle and nerve to that one task—of holding the line in France. Do not forget—at that time the French were tired out and the Americans had not yet come in. It was not possible to spare the energy, the time, the skilled men, the troops or the money for the purpose of stiffening that immense and inert mass."

"Harry always thought you could have done a great deal——" she persisted.

"And I always had the greatest possible respect for your husband's opinion," was Waveney's reply.

"As a matter of fact the thing had gone beyond England—quite beyond her," said Fallon, "she's too old and too tired. The States may save the world: it is at least possible. Some of these strange, shrewd, fellow countrymen

of yours, Mrs. Ashburnham, may be able to help—who knows? Life has prepared them for the task, their industrial civilization has been more alive, more flexible, more equitable than ours.”

Sidney thought of George Rendall and nodded.

“While I am not prepared wholly to agree with you,” Waveney remarked meditatively, “yet in one point I do—heartily. Our industrial life suffers frightfully from a lack of flexibility and our mechanical civilization is sick of pure ennui. The States have the advantage of us there. We are too much in grooves—the grooves of habit and Trades Unionism. A country where the first generation may be (say) industrial, the second professional, the third something else, offers a high stimulus to life. Here we have dulled the race industrially by making it harder for the individual to break away. We have kept the farmer’s son, a farmer, and the weaver’s son, a weaver, too long. With the American, life has less the aspect of a task to be done—than of a race to be run for—a prize to be won.”

“Well,” Fallon agreed rising, “there’s only one question I am asking and that is: in this sickness of the nations is Germany the only one that is going to survive?”

The talk lasted only a few minutes longer, during which Waveney questioned Fallon di-

rectly on certain special points and then the journalist took his leave.

Among the letters which Sidney found awaiting her at home, was one bearing a Derbyshire postmark and reading as follows:

“My dear Niece:

It has always been my habit to visit town in May and in October and now that this horrid war seems likely to end, I propose to resume the custom, occupying my usual rooms at Robinson’s Hotel, on Friday next. No doubt you will come to see me there on the following day if you are disengaged as I suppose you are—since being a stranger you cannot as yet have any large London acquaintance. We should have met before if poor Harry had been alive; and I still feel however short your honeymoon, that a part of it should have been spent in a visit to the Grange. However, all that is ended, and now that I understand you have returned from Cornwall and are about to pass the winter in London, sans chaperone, I feel it my duty to come up to town and see for myself what you are about. In my young days it would have been thought better taste if you had retired to some quiet cheap country place during your widowhood; particularly as I suppose you to be a young woman of some personal attractions or Harry would hardly have so far forgotten himself as to marry an American. I always think it best to be *frank* and so I don’t mind saying that his doing so was very upsetting to me,—especially when I heard from my cousin Blanche Allott that instead of being *rich*, as I thought you *all were*,—you had even been professionally employed. But the War, they tell me, has changed a great deal in that respect so I shan’t hold it against you. I must say you write a good letter, nor can I forget that you have never asked me to continue the £200 I always allowed Harry as my heir. So perhaps we had better meet and have a talk, when you will find me disposed to be your friend, and I need not say that my friendship will be quite *indispensable* to you in this country.

Please tell Mrs. Chuck, the housekeeper at Robinson’s that

my sheets must be aired *at least* 24 hours before I use them, and that I do not intend to pay for coals a sixpence more than I did last spring a year ago. These people, even the best of them, use the War as an excuse to fleece one, and I know London. Also you had better go to the place where they issue the food tickets and tell them I am coming (mention the Grange, Cubiton) that I am past ninety, and must have plenty of meat. I remain, my dear Sidney,

Your affectionate,

Aunt Clara."

There was much in this epistle to bring Harry's oft-repeated and vivid description of his old relation before Sidney's eyes, while she knew enough of England to take its blunt phrases for no more than what they were worth. So she attended to the writer's rather inconvenient demands as best she might, and betook herself to the small South Kensington hotel on the appointed afternoon with a good deal of amusement and curiosity. Mrs. Cubitt (or Mrs. Ashburnham-Cubitt as she preferred to be called) was a character even in her own county, which she ruled with all the force of a strong individuality backed by the tradition of generations. To the tradition of being an Ashburnham, she had added the solid impetus gained by having married a rich Yorkshireman, a combination which carried her influence irresistibly over the countryside. She was generous, impetuous and quite without sensitiveness, while her retired life and affluent circumstances

had immunized her wholly from the changes in the social fabric, which others could not ignore.

Such was the lady Mrs. Ashburnham found seated by the fire that dull afternoon, with her small feet straight before her on a cushion and her crotched stick ready to her hand. Evidently she had never been either tall or handsome and now in her great age she gave merely the effect of dominance as expressed by her big nose, bright eyes, and shrunken body shrouded in furs. Under the furs she was rather elaborately dressed; her lace cap was of the shape associated with the Queen of Scots; rings of size and brilliance adorned the two middle fingers of each hand while some really tremendous specimens of the jeweller's art were scattered about her person. Her manner in greeting her nephew's wife was not unfriendly; she held the girl's hand in her small, sparkling claw and looked her up and down with nods of approval.

"You're rather pale for what we consider fine-lookin'," was her verdict. "Still, you look easy to manage and I dare say we shall get on. Harry, of course, might have had any gell in the county, but I've lived long enough to know that men never do what one expects . . . Yes, you'll do . . . quite. Somebody said your people came from Boston, and they're more like us, ain't they, in that part?"

Sidney hastened to reassure Aunt Clara as to the Englishness of New England, a matter on which, by the way, she had her own doubts, and she answered the next very plain questions concerning her family and home in a manner as direct as the lady's own.

“Well, no doubt it might have been worse,” commented the philosopher in furs. “You give one a straight answer and you ain’t touchy. I must say it’s a disappointment you’re not havin’ a shillin’ . . . Such swarms of you as keep runnin’ over here with your pockets simply stuffed; fillin’ the railway carriages and hotels and demoralizin’ everything—it’s hard luck that Harry had to pick out one of the poor ones!”

Aunt Clara’s shrewd little eyes were searching Sidney’s face during these observations and there is no doubt that the quiet poise with which she replied to them and added that she was entirely satisfied with things as they were, favourably impressed the old woman. Sidney was neither shy nor forward, neither awkward nor cocksure; she was what Aunt Clara termed “quite the gentlewoman” and that potentate thereupon modified her tone of patronage and told a long story about Harry’s boyhood, “he was a devil my dear!” was her parenthesis—in a tone of much relish. The younger woman hoped she had forgotten the money question but it was not a question Aunt Clara was likely

to forget. She reopened it, however, in a vein of greater urbanity, and when she thumped her stick violently on the floor it was only to emphasize her points.

“What I always did for Harry I was glad to do, my dear,” she remarked and there was pride in her voice. “Harry was splendid always. He was my heir—money and land—’cause they ought to go together. But now he’s gone and who’ll get everything?—that other nephew of mine, the writin’ fella! *He* never went to France, but stayed at home and wrote to the *Times* tellin’ ’em all how to fight!” Her sniff was ironical. “Now the problem is what’s to be done for you. I don’t suppose,” she concluded cunningly, “that Harry let you think I’d do anything special—now did he?”

“Harry never talked to me about money at all,” the younger woman said with a convincing dignity. “We had barely six weeks together. Harry wasn’t the kind of person to worry about the future. He knew there would be a pension and a little of my own——”

“Precious little!” from Aunt Clara’s chair.

“And he had confidence in me—in me because he knew I was quite able to take care of myself if need be,” finished Mrs. Ashburnham, with a sturdiness of emphasis that caused the old eyes watching her to blink a little.

“Well, I shall talk it over with my solicitor

and I have no doubt we shall see eye to eye in this matter," Mrs. Cubitt said, with softer inflections, but broke off impatiently as her maid entered with a card, "Devil take you, Mackenzie, what is it now?"

The maid, an elderly woman, looked comically alarmed, but Mrs. Cubitt's wrath passed away when she read the name presented. "It's Blanche Allott, of course, ten minutes too early! but she'll have to come up. Now my dear," she turned to Sidney as the maid disappeared, "you will come again in a day or so and I'll see what I can do. Yes, yes!" as the other made a deprecatory gesture. "We're gettin' on very well and I like spirit. But perhaps it would be best to give you a home instead of an allowance," this with characteristically sudden change of plan. "How'd you fancy that, now? You seem a good gell, and I'm often lonely at the Grange. Besides you could be useful to me there in all sorts of ways."

The imminent approach of the Lady Blanche Allott spared Sidney from the necessity of making a definite answer to this appalling proposition. She successfully concealed her horrified amusement under an appeal to Aunt Clara's business instincts by alluding to the terms of her present lease which had yet some months to run, and then hastened to retire after the proper farewells. She was still trying not to laugh as

she passed Lady Blanche in the hall with brief greetings, and heard her boom out her welcome to her relative, but once in the street she gave way wholly, to the amazement of the hall-porter.

On her way home Sidney reflected that on the whole the interview had been less trying than she had expected. Although she didn't want Aunt Clara's money, yet she was not above feeling glad that the old lady should like her well enough to wish to give it to her. Mrs. Ashburnham, indeed, had knocked about the world long enough to be quite human in these matters.

The conversation between Lady Blanche and her cousin was long and animated. It ranged from lamentations over the Government and the rise in prices to rejoicings over the near prospects of peace. It touched, with a light candor refreshing to both parties, upon the faults and failings of most of their family and acquaintance, reflecting as these did the faults and failings of what both ladies felt to be an un-Christian age. Incidentally, Mrs. Cubitt was led to express her pleased surprise in the matter of the young lady who had just left her. "Poor Harry's widow," she informed Lady Blanche, had turned out so much better than she had looked for, that she was seriously considering asking her to make her home at the

Grange, where assistance in the village was very much needed.

The other drew her eyebrows together. She was a placid person, by no means malicious and with the direct kindness of her order. Unfortunately, this order can become very hard when its patronage is rejected. Had the Lady Blanche found Sidney Ashburnham inclined to look up to her and seek her guidance with the deference she held proper to their respective positions, no one would have been kinder. Unfortunately, Sidney had done nothing of the kind. Not only had she manifested a complete independence of "the Family" but she had flirted with Wroxeter, who was getting too old for that sort of thing in his sister's opinion, and she had—most unforgivable of all!—exercised her attraction so as to interfere with the plans laid by her superiors for Laura Theydon's settlement in life. All this made it desirable that Mrs. Ashburnham should not be encouraged. Now old Mrs. Cubitt lived alone, isolated from family influences and subject to sudden caprices.

Surely, it was not to be borne, that this young person should obtain a foothold in such a household, where she might use undisturbed an influence leading in due time to an important position in that family, where money was sadly to lack. With money who could be sure of her?

Even Wroxeter himself was not safe! and Lady Blanche grew chilly at the thought.

However, she was wise enough to begin slowly.

“I should not imagine that she was at all the kind of person you would want at the Grange, Clara,” was her cautious observation. Whereat, as she hoped, old Mrs. Cubitt thumped her stick on the floor and sharply asked:

“Why not?”

CHAPTER XVII

THE odd sense of disorientation which affected Waveney, followed him in his work and destroyed the restfulness of his scant leisure. He seemed to carry it with him to the Foreign Office, the Lords and the Reform Club, conscious of it as a background even to the mounting exultation of those days. But he failed to find that it was shared by friends or colleagues, whose mood was rather one of relieved bewilderment. As the retreat continued and the ice-jam here and there cracked with the shriek of helpless human atoms caught in these forces, as the ebb left one after another fiercely disputed point in Allied hands—England found herself blinking, as it were, before the strong glare of victory. So long had people borne the stiffened lip and steadied eye that they had lost the habit of relaxing into confidence . . . meeting, they spoke of victory with bated breath, fearing the Gods might hear. They had so often been disappointed!

Had anyone told Waveney that he should behold the end of the nightmare with such grave disquiet, he would have found it hard to believe. But the mood grew more definite as he

felt that the problems and situations of his country as well as his individual problems and situation, had become more rather than less complicated by this ending. The attitude of Capital, purblind and timid, of labour arrogant and short-sighted; the exhaustion, which made the average man long to give up the strain of self-denial; the absence of either intellect or personal magnetism in the leadership of affairs; the suspicion of rivalry among parties; the chronic revolution in Ireland, in Egypt and also probably in India—all these conditions made but a black future. Moreover he felt that his own lassitude—which was partly physical and nervous—furnished a key to the weariness of others. Never had he been so dissatisfied with his task or with himself.

All these considerations served to modify his disappointment concerning the Ambassadorship, a blow to his pride which would otherwise have been more sharply felt. He carried the note he had received to Mrs. Ashburnham, and watched the curl of her indignant lip as she read it. It was unofficial, from an important source, and stripped of diplomatic verbiage remained to the effect that his name had better be withdrawn in connection with that appointment. As peace drew near the situation had changed: the President of the United States—a doctrinaire idealist, in Foreign Office eyes—was certain to

play a prominent rôle during the negotiations. It was whispered that he might abandon precedent and come himself to Europe to exert his influence. If so, Washington would cease to be the strategic centre and the question of its Ambassador were wisely postponed. To all intents and purposes the Chancelleries of the world would all be temporarily, at least, congregated in Geneva, Brussels or Versailles. Waveney must be patient; this was not his moment. After all, the letter delicately intimated, he had never identified himself with the present Government and future posts were much more likely to be allotted to the more open adherents of the Premier—than to a mere Liberal of the Classic school.

When Sidney raised her eyes from this epistle, he met them with a slight shrug.

“What,” he asked her, “do you think of that last sentence? If anything could bring me into agreement with the writer—that would do it.”

“You know what I think—that it is too stupid to be even annoying.”

“Annoying? Oh, I never thought of it . . . besides, I am tired.”

Plainly, he was very tired; and his eyes clung to her quiet figure as if drawing rest from the sight of it.

“These hours,” he said, “are—do you realize?—the only ones in my day when I may speak my mind. Most men are more fortunate—they

have the evenings—family life of one sort or another—but I have been, I have been for years very much alone.”

She assented gravely. The fog had settled down early without, so they had been glad to draw the curtains. The little room was filled with the soft glow of firelight, and it lit up his bloodless face as he leaned forward towards the hearth.

“Do you know,” Adrian continued, abruptly, “that I have often thought of getting out altogether?”

“I do not wonder—you need it. . . .”

“Perhaps after all this . . . when one can, I shall go down and hide myself in the New Forest and busy myself going over some old notes I made the year I was in the East—dealing with the situation there as I saw it . . . I wonder—I wonder if I might show them to you and get your opinion?”

Her face lit up with pleasure and he was content—content in a deeper sense than he had ever known. Since they left Wroxeter Old House there had been nothing to baffle or disturb him in their relation. . . . It had the steadiness of pure friendship. He brought no self-consciousness into it—he felt none. He knew only that as the day drew on toward five o’clock, he began to look forward to the quiet room, the fire, their talk, as a man looks forward to his home.

From this quiet enjoyment he was roused by Sidney's asking him with a touch of hesitation:

"Do you remember Harry's old aunt in Derbyshire?"

"Mrs. Ashburnham-Cubitt of the Grange? Very well indeed. She is a most amazing old person—quite a character in short, a survival of the Georgian rather than the Victorian era. . . . Have you seen her? You told me I think, that she was coming up."

"Yes, I saw her two or three days ago, and I expected to go again to-day. We had a very pleasant talk. She was blunt, but that I understand; and certainly I left her in the highest good humour. . . . In fact," continued Sidney, trying to smile and speak gayly, "she asked me to come to her, to make the Grange my home. . . . And—and—but you had best read what she says."

Puzzled, Adrian took the letter.

"My dear Niece:

As I told you, I always believe in being frank; and so am writing to say that on further consideration I have decided that you would not be at all the sort of person I should wish to have with me at the Grange. I hear from more than one source that you have a great many *Radicals* among your friends; and that you have shown no inclination to be guided by our Family. Also, I am told you are extremely fond of admiration and that would not suit me in the least, in a companion, I mean. I should not wish you to look for any admiration while under my roof; and an independent disposition would be very inconvenient in my household. I have

always heard that Americans were the most independent of all the Colonials, but in your case I had hoped better. I cannot conceal that all this has *disappointed* and *vexed* me very much; and of course there is now no question of my assisting you financially or socially. Since you are so independent of the Family, you can hardly expect the Family to take you up, whatever Wroxeter may do; and that I can assure you, may be a disadvantage rather than the reverse. I regret my mistake, and will add that we had probably better say good-bye here and now and spare an interview which might be disagreeable to us both. I leave London in a day or two, as I am very much upset."

When Adrian lifted his eyes to her's, there was a gleam of laughter in them, but he could see that his friend was hurt. He ran over the epistle again with comments:

"‘I hear from more than one source.’ Well, I can guess what *one* may be. . . . ‘Radicals among your friends’ tchk, that is, of course, myself. . . . Here is no mystery . . . it is all quite plain . . . do not let it give you an instant’s concern."

"‘But it does . . . it must! I did not think I had an enemy in the world!’"

Waveney’s slow smile responded. "‘The successful always make enemies,’" he observed, "‘and you are one of the most successful people I have ever met.'"

"‘I never asked that old woman for anything!’" Mrs. Ashburnham indignantly assured him. "‘I should never have lived with her . . . I didn’t want her money. . . . I all but told her so. I can support myself.'"

“That was the trouble,—she acknowledges it. She expected and wanted dependence. . . . But is the affair important? Brush it aside; forget it. That you should have an enemy is disconcerting, but not uncommon. . . . The world is wide and this old lady is ninety-odd and lives ten miles from the railway.”

She felt he was right but her vexation was slow to yield. “It makes me feel all the more that I am a stranger,” she restlessly uttered. “It makes me want to go back!” and she was by way of being snubbed when Adrian fixed a calm eye on her, remarking gently cold: “I do not think, you know, that the malice of women is national!”

Nevertheless the rebuke took effect and caused her to put the incident out of her thought before Adrian did. At the bottom of his mind and knowing his world; it made him a little uneasy.

Shortly after this conversation he paid a visit he had long contemplated, which was suddenly made easy for him by the loan of a motor from a friend on the Staff. He left Smith Square about two, flashed northward and ran out Watling Street for an hour or more. His destination was Beddingfield, the seat of the Marquess of Beauvray, where one of the last of England’s great Victorian nobles dwelt in a retirement confirmed by many tragedies. The motor was powerful and smooth; the au-

tumn afternoon still held its sunshine. Mist lay on the hills: the busy birds hastened to and fro over the fields. Adrian had sunk so deep in thought that he did not rouse until the car paused before the great ornamental iron gates, with the couchant lions topping them on either hand. Then, as it purred up the long slope of avenue, he noted with regret that the trees of the Park, the shrubbery and the lawns all showed the forced neglect of these long four years. For Adrian, the place held poignant memories; and he found himself more agitated by them than he could have believed possible. When he came in sight of the house—a vast Palladian building, stretching its white arcades right and left into elaborately composed terraces—he saw that the marble vases bordering these terraces stood empty of bloom—no longer filled with geraniums which caused them to blaze scarlet in the sun. A vital memory possessed him of the last time he had so beheld them: and when they seemed to symbolize in their glow of color, a glow in his life which he seemed forever renouncing. Again he suffered a stab of that forgotten pain—and he was even paler than usual when he mounted to the entrance.

That he had been looked for was evident. The door was opened by an elderly butler, walking with a slight limp, who welcomed him with af-

fectionate deference and who led the way through the huge, cold halls of the house to the terraces upon its southern aspect. Here the gardens—though their bloom, of course, was past—were still rich with autumn coloring and surrounded as a setting, by yew hedges, fantastically crenellated. The place had nothing of the rich warm loveliness of Wroxeter Old House, dyed in the intimate dignity of generations, exhaling as a perfume that feeling for the soil, which is so marvellously preserved by the older English country houses. This was a different atmosphere, and one which the War had somehow contrived to freeze. This huge, awkwardly splendid mansion, created but for magnificence, seemed now to possess only the cold stateliness of a tomb. It had never been a part of life or a product of the countryside—rather had it been super-imposed upon them—a burden borne—an organism without vitality, and now forever atrophied.

Surely, a touching frame for the figure toward which Waveney was now moving; an old, weak, bent man in a wheeled chair, who sat in the sunniest corner of the terrace with a rug over his knees and gazed listlessly down the long slope where shone a glint of distant water. Waveney could perceive this figure for some moments before he reached it: and no man knew better for what it had stood in the past. Here was one

who had known Dizzy, that eagle in peacock's plumes, and the inscrutable "Pam"—one who had watched with dignified alarm the rise of "Mr. G." Here was one whose memory held pictures of a society over which the curtain had finally descended. Here was one who had seen the Beauties and the Dandies and the Emperors while they were still strutting about the earth . . . who had seen the world of Art rent asunder by Turner—and the world of ideas by Darwin—who had witnessed the struggle of the gods of the nineteenth century and must now behold their twilight.

Once more, that feeling of mistaken purpose, that doubt of ambition, crossed the younger man's mind as he advanced toward the wheeled chair, bringing with it a taste of bitterness and wonder.

"And is *this* my desire? This what I strive for? To sit in the sunshine, an old, neglected, declining man—forgotten by the people I led, the party I served? Tragically disappointed—as in the son wiped out at Mons—the daughter—worse ended still . . . and gazing at the chilly bones of all this cumbrous splendour?"

CHAPTER XVIII

HIS hearty, "Well sir; how glad I am to see you looking so well!" showed, it is needless to say, no hint of these thoughts. Morton brought him a chair, while Beauvray held his hand in his own brittle-looking, blue-veined one. A big, white borzoi rose, stretching herself, and put her muzzle on his knee for a caress, before her master's voice settled her down again. A colony of rooks overhead chattered about their business. The garden held, now and again, the humming of a few late bees.

Their talk was the talk of Englishmen, slow, reflective, often sententious, hiding those things each sought from the other under the trivialities of sport and gossip. The elder man turned toward the younger a glance of tired affection. He spoke of the battle with reticent satisfaction; of Government with frank disapprobation; and of Waveney's recently withdrawn opportunity with due comprehension of all that it implied.

"They will not send you," was his comment, "because you are neither one of *us*, nor one of them."

"They are sending nobody at present—for good reasons."

The other assented, but his eyes were hardly

interested. When he spoke again, it was with a visible effort and in another tone.

“Waveney—I wanted a word with you—about Claire. You have not, I think, seen Claire lately?”

“I have never seen Lady Claire since that day,” Waveney answered, his face stiffening. The old man’s eyes rested on his with a look that was almost entreaty.

“Then you really do not know about Claire—recently, I mean?”

“I know nothing—I know nothing about her.”

“You do not wish to know—I understand! I can never forget what you did—how you saved us.”

“Against my will—you remember?”

“I have not forgotten.” There was a touch of spirit and hauteur in the old man and he raised his hand as if to protest. The borzoi had risen to lay her slender head across his knee and he stroked it as he talked. His voice was the even, unmoved voice of his caste, but Waveney could supply all its unused imploring inflections.

“Claire has been so much better these last few months. There were the drugs to be conquered, but she had not been taking them so long as to be a regular addict. I myself thought she would never recover—perhaps I hoped it!”

Waveney was silent.

“But she has recovered in large measure. For a year she has taken nothing and shows no disposition to relapse. She is stronger—almost well. She is absorbed in war-work as she can be—she gives every moment. That she realizes—I feel sure!”

“That is of course something,” said Waveney, but his voice remained cold.

“But she is troubled—Claire is troubled, just because she does realize. She knows that but for you she would never have had another chance. She clings to life now—so much. Since Winstanley—poor lad—has gone, she has felt her situation terribly. She is young still and can atone.”

“I do not think so—I do not think she can atone.” His voice was gentle but terrible in its finality and Lord Beauvray winced.

“Still—you are willing she should try?”

“Never to the extent of mingling in the world again—of going about quite freely among innocent people.”

“But to have a quiet life,” the elder man spoke with a touch of anguish, “taste some peace and happiness—be perhaps of some use? You would not wish to prevent that?”

“No, I suppose I would not wish to prevent that.”

Lord Beauvray went on more quietly: “Well, there seems more chance of it these last few

months. If only nothing comes out—! That is what Claire dreads! That is what she fears will come to pull her back. You are sure, Waveney, that the truth will not come out?”

Waveney paused before answering; and his reply came with full weight of this moment's consideration back of it.

“I am certain—I am quite certain. Who could tell? Lord John?”

“My brother John? My God no!”

“Quite so. And you are sure of Morton's fidelity, I take it?”

The old man made a proud gesture. “Not less than of John's. But it is not that Claire is afraid of.”

“What then? There is only you and I.”

“You have forgotten the Government agent.”

“The Government agent?”

“The woman you sent for—that young woman—you remember—the one who finally induced her to confess. You said she was employed by the Government, but you never told us her name.”

Waveney's hand on his knee clenched and stiffened. The blood came into his white face. He could not have told why he felt so furiously insulted.

“Are you sure of her?” repeated Beauvray, with increasing anxiety. And Waveney, finding his voice:

“Of *her*? Absolutely.”

“But a mere detective——”

“She was no mere detective. I am as sure of her as of myself. Anything else would be impossible—impossible.”

It was so rare to hear the quiet man speak like this that Beauvray glanced at him with a curiosity in which the other saw danger. He took a moment to relight his cigar, and fold his hands together over his knee, then went on to question his host in a manner half-indifferent—half obviously patient, as one who must bear with the crotchets of the sick and old.

“Has she any reason for this alarm? Any foundation for it? Has anyone suggested such an idea to her? She saw nothing afterwards of this—of this lady. She could hardly even recognize her.”

“Oh, she remembers her very well. Her power—her ability—the way she conquered my poor Claire—how could she ever forget it? She remembers it with dread. The woman’s face comes up at night. And then. . . .”

“And then . . . ?”

“You see, Claire has become a great spiritualist. It has been the means of saving her, she thinks.” The old voice grew half hesitating, half-apologetic, but the listener made no sign. “I don’t know what you feel about all these revelations? but there must be something

in 'em—eh? Lodge, you know—and Conan Doyle and those people all think there's something in it, don't they?"

"They say so. And so Lady Claire has taken to mediums? She is quite comforted by them?"

"Oh quite! The whole world has been changed for her by it—by one particular medium, I should say—Madame Charles, I mean."

Waveney made a mental note of the name: his manner was quietly sympathetic and showed no trace of the thin current of uneasiness that began to run through his mind while the older man, encouraged by his attitude, was speaking.

"Yes, yes, Mme. Charles has brought hope to poor Claire. . . . She has had communications from Winstanley and it seems he has wholly forgiven her. . . . Oh! that has meant *everything* to Claire . . . she feels an elevation, an encouragement to live that she never felt before. . . . I saw it in her poor tortured face—it was at peace. . . . But at their last séance something happened that frightened her dreadfully."

"Yes?"

The narrator's voice had paused, faded out, and he sunk weakly back for an instant into the shadow of this tragedy of the past. Delicately, almost tenderly, Waveney caught him back, just as the sorrow was clouding his eyes and his mouth hung open, forgetting to go on.

“Where was I? . . . yes, that last séance—oh yes, it frightened her. . . . She went there that day with Laura Theydon—she sees a good deal of Laura these days and they went together. Laura heard Mme. Charles herself and she certainly told them both that Claire’s future was menaced by a dark woman. And who could this dark woman be? Laura Theydon thinks it was meant for *her*, not Claire—the spirits were confused that day and Laura thinks she knows who it is.”

“Does Miss Theydon know——?”

“Oh no, no of course not!” The denial was so obviously sincere before the sternness of that enquiry, that Waveney relaxed again. “Laura knows nothing—nothing! But Claire knows—and it must be this woman—Claire remembers that she was dark and good-looking. Do you think the spirits *are* warning Claire?”

“My dear fellow . . . ! the other began and then paused. To take up the matter with sincerity was so difficult, particularly as the conjunction of Laura Theydon and Claire Winstanley sent a little icy fear all through his blood. The pause quieted this chilly nervousness, but when he spoke again, it was deliberately, impersonally—in his best manner. He gave Beauvray as unconcernedly as possible his opinion about mediums in general—Mme. Charles in particular. He showed plainly that the incident in it-

self had not served to rehabilitate Lady Claire in his good opinion, and her means of obtaining hope and strength to go on living after so deadly a fiasco were not those he would have chosen. He said all this so coldly aloof and so gently that an invalid could not be jarred nor a father offended. But the great blow which Claire Winstanley had dealt had been so complete to pride and so ruinous to the future—of not only her father but his brother, who had had to resign his portfolio, and to the entire family—that it had dulled Beauvray's capacity for suffering and understanding. He had been a partial invalid before, he was a confirmed invalid now. He had descended into *hell*; and he could suffer no further. Even his anxiety and his perceptions were no longer keen. He merely wanted to be reassured and Waveney gave him this reassurance in the most positive manner.

"I do not care for all the witches in Endor myself," he said, "and this jargon of a dark lady has and can have no reference to——" He checked at the name as Beauvray pushed away the dog's head from his knee to say:

"But Laura heard it—there was no deception! A slender dark woman was named."

"You say Miss Theydon thought this malign influence was intended to apply to something in her own life——"

"Well?"

“Well, perhaps she was right—perhaps she was right! Who knows? There are plenty of dark ladies about, you know—I’ve been staying at Wroxeter myself with one—and Miss Theydon was there and Miss Theydon didn’t like her very well—if I am any judge of a lady’s mind. . . . When did this happen?”

“A few days ago. Claire told me just before I had Morton telephone you.”

“Quite so. I understand. I think Mme. Charles is probably a clever student of human nature. Certainly, she must have talked with many women before this.”

“Are you sure this woman will keep faith?”

“As of myself.”

“But why are you so sure?” Beauvray persisted a little petulantly. “She was never paid anything——”

“Perhaps for that reason. Anyhow I am sure.”

“Waveney—tell me the woman’s name! Tell me who it is!”

“I refused two years ago, my dear fellow. I am more than ever convinced that I was wise.”

“But can I take the responsibility to assure Claire that she has nothing to fear—from this unknown enemy!”

Lord Waveney had rarely been obliged to exert self-control so often as this afternoon and had never in his life been more conscious of anger.

The pupils of the eyes which he turned upon the elder were so big and dark that they were startling and Beauvray twisted in his chair under the low words:

“You do not need to take any responsibility. I take the responsibility! I take it here and now in my solemn statement . . . Lady Claire has no enemy—need fear no spy. You may assure her of it—on my honour.”

“Quite so—quite so—of course!” Beauvray could only murmur deprecatingly in face of this most unwonted vehemence, but the next instant doubt again showed itself:

“The point is,” he added, “I cannot myself see how you come to be so absolutely sure of any Government employee. I could never have been so in the days I held office.”

“Perhaps not. Let it rest that I am. And now I must go.”

He had intended to stay much longer but suddenly felt that to be impossible—he must hurry away. The other clung to his hand, repeating rather wistfully:

“So soon? Must you go so soon? But Claire is here—I was just going to send for her—Won’t you wait, my dear boy, to see Claire?”

“Thank you, no. I must get back to town at once,” the other insisted, then softened his refusal by adding in his serene voice, “After all—I am so very glad for a great deal you have

told me. My dear fellow, that she is—is so far recovered and able to be with you, means very much, doesn't it? It has turned out better, at least, than we feared."

The elder man's eyes rested on his face with a sudden, penetrating and steady gleam which sought for the truth, found it, and in turn revealed his own perception of it. A whole tragedy of realization lay in that gaze. Then his withered eyelids fell over it. The cloud had not lifted from his face and he let his hand drop listlessly back on the dog's head as his friend bade him good-bye and turned away.

As Waveney paused at the corner of the terrace to make a final gesture of farewell, he saw a woman approaching from the house—a meagre, wasted figure, whose half-servile, half-arrogant carriage had a touch of abnormality somewhere—and under his breath he made a sound of loathing.

The car was waiting at the entrance and he hurried to reach it. As it spun out of the avenue and between the great gates, Waveney found that he was wiping his forehead with his handkerchief.

CHAPTER XIX

Miss Rendall was attached to an office in Victoria Street, whose windows opened on a roaring stream of traffic and a strip of sky pierced by the towers of the Abbey. In moments of depression, when she perhaps doubted the value of all that output of feminine energy which the office represented, Mildred would gaze upon those significant lopped spires, which she told herself she was helping to defend. Their enduring and glorious presence renewed faith in one's heritage, shared with the English and born of them. Surely, her heart was right when it cried that but for George and herself and thousands like them, the Abbey towers might have been as empty as those of Rheims.

Mildred had said good-bye to George, said it with admirable stiffness and in the proper manner. Ever since that motor-visit whither his sister's sore heart had followed him, George had preserved a certain unusual reticence. True, he had answered his sister's eager questions—yes, he'd seen Mrs. Ashburnham—had a long talk with her. Yes: the house had been one of those really fine old ones that Mildred would love, with

oak beams, and gardens and hedges and pools and things. Cordial? Indeed yes—everybody had been awfully nice, had given him tea and talk . . . they were the real sort. The man they'd seen at the station was Lord Wroxeter himself—a perfect gentleman every inch of him and jolly and kind as possible. Of Waveney, George said nothing. His sister would have liked details, but then she always liked more details than he was prone to give. George had been in the past no more expansive to her than brothers are to sisters generally, when they are fond of them—but Mildred had been closer to him during their exile and this closing of a door between them made her heart heavier when the parting came.

Her mind being so full of George, Mildred had found it hard to wait for the day when Mrs. Ashburnham had stated that she would be back in town. This date had not been definitely given, and thus Miss Rendall was furnished with the excuse she needed for calling at the flat to enquire. Her loneliness, too, pressed upon her and heightened her memory of her new acquaintance's fascination.

On a pleasant October afternoon she took the bus, getting out at Mount Street, as Mrs. Ashburnham had advised. The Park was full of people and the Row of riders. The sky had its sinister flowering of golden balloon-like bubbles

and shining silver aeroplanes. Mildred felt youthfully excited as she walked along Mount Street—looking carefully for the garden-gate to which she had been directed. She told herself she was merely going to enquire, but in her heart, fresh and full of romance, she hoped for admission.

Dora welcomed this pleasant young lady without a qualm. Dora had, for some time past been expecting orders from her mistress to cover this contingency, having inferred from previous experience, that when the same gentleman called day after day and he “my lord”—one’s mistress was not apt to be at home to other visitors. But so far such instructions had not been given.

Mildred heard voices beyond and was ushered at once upon a scene of work and a thin trace of tobacco-smoke. A man sat in a big chair, pulling over some papers which lay on his knee, in the most intimate and comfortable way in the world. There were more papers placed on the table which stood before Mrs. Ashburnham, who jumped up and warmly greeted her visitor. Shyness was not Mildred’s characteristic, but her feelings on this occasion were mixed enough to produce awkwardness. Joy and excitement at seeing her friend; awe at the stranger she found there and who was an exalted personage in Mildred’s naïve view; jealousy of his being there in such intimacy; doubt that she was welcome at

the moment—all these feelings lent stiffness to her tongue and trouble to her eyes.

Mrs. Ashburnham herself did not seem quite at her ease, but she soon regained it, and Waveney was not a man in whose society one could remain long constrained. He was so kindly cordial to the uniform; accepted the interruption so pleasantly and joined so gaily in the talk that the cloud soon vanished. There was nothing to indicate his disappointment when he gathered up his papers and—after a proper interval—took his leave, his thoughts occupied in trying to define the special quality which made Mrs. Ashburnham so very different from the rest of her compatriots.

Although his manner had been perfect, yet Mildred was troubled by his departure, which she showed in face and voice when the door closed behind them.

“I fear I’ve driven your friend off—I’m so sorry.”

“You needn’t be,” replied Mrs. Ashburnham lightly; then seeing in the girl’s embarrassment a touch of exaggerated sensitiveness, she warmly added: “My dear child—don’t give it another thought! Men always have plenty of chances—Waveney can bring his work another day. And you and I need a talk—don’t we? Have you been lonely?”

“Awfully!” said poor Mildred, very sorry

for herself and grateful for the sympathy which caused the other to give her hand a warm squeeze, while she said:

“Of course—you poor dear! And did you know I’ve had a letter from your brother? Oh, it is only about that stupid business of mine but it was so good of him . . . ! I didn’t know people could be so considerate.”

“George is *always* considerate,” Mildred said.

“So I see.” There was nothing intimate or personal in the letter, and this fact, coupled with her hostess’s sympathetic manner, unlatched Mildred’s heart. She fixed her eyes on her admired friend—poured out her affairs and her loneliness and after a while she remembered to ask:

“Then you *are* going home?”

“I can’t answer,” smiled Mrs. Ashburnham, and added. “Moreover, I don’t know if it is going home—for me.”

“Things are going so splendidly in France,” Mildred ventured “that one has more right to think of one’s own affairs—”

“Of course—” said the other and turned the talk entirely to the prospects of peace. Hope and cheer, seemed to Mildred, to radiate from her presence . . . through that restful room, so delicately austere that one could relax in it without feeling too luxurious.

They talked about everything: Mildred greedy of sympathy, and the other glad to see her ex-

pression—which had been rather worn, poor child! light up again. The hour sped past, and when Miss Rendall rose, apologetic for the length of her stay, Sidney sent her away happy with an invitation to dinner in the following week.

An intimate friendship between these two young women was inevitable and no longer to be delayed. Mildred's letters to George became filled with it . . . her romantic sense being satisfied to the full by her friend's personality and situation. Mrs. Ashburham had seen many things and known many people . . . who, with their quaintly defined characteristics, presented to Mildred, through Sidney's vivid mimicry, a series of individual studies of which she could never tire and by means of which this strange Island was illuminated.

Sidney, on her part, found it amusing to re-read her English surroundings through Mildred's eyes: to hear her squeal of delight that anyone should really live at "Uckfield House, Cuckfield, Bucks," or at some startling revelation of English candour. Also it was comforting to have Mildred like the kind of clothes she herself liked; and show the same sturdy self-sufficiency in which Sidney too had been bred. It was good to know that one gave pleasure, and a relief to turn to this friendship when one wearied of the problems raised by another

friendship—one which had grown of late almost alarmingly absorbing.

With an infallible instinct Sidney had been careful to allow these two intimates to meet as little as possible. A nice sense of self-preservation kept her from blundering, and her training had given her a mastery of such situations. People did not meet unless she wished them to meet—although it took a certain careful handling. If Mildred felt there was “a man in the background,” yet her previous experience did not lead her to suppose that he was daily taking tea at the flat where she herself was definitely expected only in the evenings. She shared that mild contempt with which her brother would have regarded any man habitually idle enough to take regular afternoon tea—yet she had begun to observe in England that the habit did not always imply idleness. They couldn’t *all* be lazy! Lord Wroxeter—(from Sidney’s account, for Mildred never met him) Lord Wroxeter might be, but Waveney was one of the busiest men in England. Mildred’s feeling had begun to be modified by a sense that the interdependence of the sexes was developed on somewhat different lines than those she was accustomed to see at home, and also by a touch of envy at the social structure which made such leisurely intercourse possible. Evidently they

all did it; and therefore Mildred, though jealous for George (and sometimes jealous even *of* George)—Mildred did not lay undue emphasis on Lord Waveney's frequent visits. She was not aware, of course, how regular these had lately grown to be.

CHAPTER XX

THERE were occasions, however, on which the two were bound to meet and such a meeting took place on one of those foggy afternoons which marked the passing of October. Waveney had come a little later, Mildred decidedly earlier than was expected: tea must be drunk and cigarettes lighted: they must all at least appear to enjoy it. Waveney jested in friendly-wise and Sidney, behind the tea-table, told herself it must be the fog which made one feel so oddly nervous.

“Oh, Sidney, by the way,” Mildred suddenly asked, “you know a Miss Theydon—don’t you?”

The name was like a little cold wind blowing in upon that warm and sheltered place.

“Yes—I’ve met Miss Theydon,” was the instant answer: “why?”

“She came in to the Embassy yesterday afternoon, when all of us were there together. I told you, I think, that our unit had been invited to meet some English ladies. . . . They were lovely to us. . . . This one was a tall, blonde, woman . . . very handsome . . . jade earrings?”

“I know,” Sidney replied, hastily.

“She talked to me a lot. . . . She asked me

if I knew anyone in London and I said *you*. . . Right away, she said oh yes! that she knew you very well."

"Now that's very interesting," was Sidney's comment, her smile being almost imperceptible.

"Then, as I was leaving, you know, she came up again and asked for your address. . . . She said she wanted to call on you very soon and bring a friend who wished to meet you. She made rather a point of it, so of course I gave it her. She was really awfully cordial and nice."

"I am sure she was . . . but I wonder who the friend could have been . . . I wonder?" mused Mrs. Ashburnham.

Mildred could offer no solution but guessed it was Somebody by the way Miss Theydon had spoken . . . and went on to give her opinion of the arrangements at the Embassy.

Waveney had been sitting in silence, to listen as his wont was, in smiling appreciation, but by the time Mildred had finished her story of this little encounter, his smile had given way to a look of preoccupation. A few minutes later, he interrupted her description of the unit's reception at the Embassy by rising and asking permission of his hostess to use her telephone. He was absent but a short time, and when he returned the air of preoccupation had quite vanished, his brow was clear, and he began to talk with Mildred and jest with her in a manner

light-hearted enough, so that the girl's face lit up with amusement and sympathy.

But the afternoon was destined to interruption, for the telephone bell began again its imperative clamor, and Mildred, rather to her surprise, was the next person summoned. She came running back wearing an expression of disappointment and uneasiness. The message was from her hotel, someone was waiting for her there on a matter of importance: it was all too tiresome, but she must go at once—she only hoped it had nothing to do with George . . . !

Sidney hoped so too, and was a little troubled for her, and both of them avowed themselves puzzled—notwithstanding Waveney's reassurances—by the vagueness of the summons. They kissed and parted . . . Mildred hastened from the apartment and Mrs. Ashburnham turned back to her drawing-room looking not a little worried for her friend.

“It's very odd!” she declared. “I only hope it is not bad news.”

“It is nothing,” Waveney assured her.

“Oh, I fear you are wrong—it sounds very strange to me, their not giving any reason and so on . . . I feel perhaps I ought to go over there.”

“It is nothing at all,” he repeated, and added without change of inflection—“I know, because I sent it.”

“You—?” she looked at him bereft of speech.

“Yes . . . the person who spoke to her was Parker . . . and I had instructed him to do so just a minute before. All he did was to give her a summons to her hotel. When she gets there she will find that there has been a mistake. He will arrange it and she will not be worried. Have you forgiven me?”

“Hardly. But why ——?” The action was one so wholly outside of her knowledge of him that Sidney was still half stupefied by it, nor was her amazement lessened by his complete steadiness of manner.

“I had a reason which justifies me, I assure you—I simply had to speak to you alone and knew no quicker way. I was afraid to wait till she went, as that might have been too late and I have a dinner engagement. That’s all. I am not so unscrupulous as I seem.”

He leaned over his chair toward her and impelled her gaze to meet his own.

“I am not so unscrupulous as I seem,” he repeated, “believe me—however much I might want to see you alone—however much I might want to see you alone——”

For the first time his repetitions did not arise from emphasis but from embarrassment. Her eyes had dropped and her face had grown paler. He hurried on:

“I would not have played a trick on your lit-

tle friend to secure that—that privilege. No: there was another, a much more important reason.”

The recovered quiet of his voice which just before had vibrated suddenly with a feeling to which she herself vibrated—this gave her courage and she was able to look up. The emotion had passed through the room like a great chord of music and was now stilled.

“It must be very important for you to do such a thing to poor little Mildred,” she said gravely. “I am entirely astonished . . . I couldn’t believe that you would make use of such means . . . I am much disappointed.”

With a gesture, he seemed to brush aside the incident as of nothing important, rather as if there was no such person as Mildred Rendall in the world. His face and attitude of concentration recalled the earlier days of their acquaintance so that her mind, groping in its bewilderment for some clue to his unusual conduct, began dimly to lay hold on it, and to pre-figure the subject on which he was about to speak.

“What she said about Miss Theydon——”

“About Miss Theydon?” she still stupidly repeated.

His voice showed impatience. “Yes—yes . . . she had met Laura Theydon . . . they talked of you . . . Miss Theydon remarked, apparently that she was coming to see you.”

"But surely, that would not be so ——"

"Wait a moment . . . you remember she talked of bringing a friend also to call on you . . . Do you know who it is—this friend? *Why* she is bringing her? *Why* she will surely bring her?"

"You are making me nervous—your manner is so——"

"It is Claire Winstanley."

Sidney seemed to gather herself up in her chair and sat erect; her face though grave, was not startled or shaken. Waveney, his grimace of disgust controlled, stood before her, while he narrated his visit to Beddingfield and his conversation with Lord Beauvray. The topic was fraught with memories for them both, memories which brought them more than once to the very verge of agitation, while it was being broached; but Mrs. Ashburnham had summoned her pride to her assistance. Surely, if *he* had forgotten—if *he* could speak calmly of that moment of revelation—*she* could also! She was not going to be the one to re-charge the subject with emotion.

"I felt that you must know," Adrian concluded, "so you may tell Dora to deny you when they come. It is quite evident that this woman's unbalanced mind is simply seeking about for fresh cause of excitement. She must not find it here."

"But I do not yet understand," Sidney said,

“I thought that she was locked up . . . I thought that it was to be the absolute understanding!”

“She was locked up—in a sanatorium for eighteen months,” he answered a trifle shortly. “Even to Scotland Yard it became plain she was unbalanced. . . . They could not put a morphinomane in the Tower. . . . So then when she got better—poor old Beauvray wanted her at home—” he shrugged, “what could one do after all?”

“England is certainly run by the sentimentalist and the snob!” Mrs. Ashburnham commented vigorously; and Adrian made no answer. Once more he had the sense of her independence of judgment, the feeling that she had escaped his influence and did not always think as he wished her to think. Did it come from these Rendalls? He studied her face a moment and then responded:

“You have a way—you have a way of putting us in the wrong that is very upsetting. . . . And you seem always to be putting *me* in the wrong!”

She remained silent: her face as inscrutable as his own could have been. Her heart cried out . . . “Let him try! This time he has met his match.”

“But the point is . . . if Lady Claire is like-

ly to recognize you, she must not have the chance."

"But why, Lord Waveney?"

"Why, why! You ask why?"

His serenity was gone and he poured out his feeling as if he had never been calm in his life. "Good God! Have you forgotten? I took the whole responsibility to the Government. I told Easterly you were absolutely the only woman I knew who had the integrity and intelligence for such a task. You had to make that screaming, hysterical creature confess her black treason and you did it superbly. . . . Do you think I don't *know* how you did it? . . . I—I beg your pardon if I am vehement," he caught himself back with an effort and spoke more quietly. "Now the whole matter must be buried and forgotten."

"Certainly it's strange that the idea of me should ever occur to their minds! There has been no reason and Miss Theydon knows nothing."

"You do not quite understand. The sooth-sayer was vague after the manner of her kind. Two ladies were present and she says that a dark lady threatens the future of one of them. She doesn't say which one and all Miss Theydon wants is to have her friend meet you and see if she believes you are meant. It is all so preposterous ——"

“But why should I threaten Miss Theydon’s future?” Sidney spoke smoothly and her eyes met his and held. For the life of him Adrian could not give the answer to this question and the quivering pride of her face made him suddenly conscious that he was afraid of her, terribly afraid of her. Rarely had he found himself so much at a loss: he could only mumble something about women being generally suspicious. . . . She saw that her supremacy just here, and that his own realization of inadequacy were punishment enough . . . thereupon she flung the whole question contemptuously into a corner by the remark:

“Strange, I should rise again above the horizon of that woman’s life.”

“I do not think so. Truth is like that. It has an attractive as well as propulsive power. We stand for what we are. You *are* the person and therefore Lady Claire is, all ignorantly, occupied with you. But we must not lose time . . . they may turn up any day. . . . Will you call in Dora and tell her?”

She made no movement toward the bell, but sat passive, her slender hand laid palm outward to cover her eyes. He leaned forward in his chair, openly concentrated upon, intensely watching her. She knew that, dared she look, she would see that the pupils of his eyes were

big and black as they had been when—so she did not look.

Adrian, on his part, was conscious only that her yielding in this matter was of vital importance, that she had never seemed so exquisite, so frail, so much to be protected . . . ! Her answer when it came was reflective.

“I am considering. After all, perhaps I had better let her come—perhaps the truth is best. Do you see what I mean? You say she fears me now, because she thinks I am some paid detective who may blackmail her. Well, she cannot go on thinking that after we meet. She will be reassured and her fears quieted. If I talk to her——”

“You must not talk to her—I cannot have you talk to that woman! It is unthinkable.” He spoke with a roughness altogether unlike his usual persuasive manner. He was irritated beyond measure—he wanted to shake her. It seemed to him that her determination to leave him out of the matter was wanton—he could not bear it.

“I tell you, you must never meet her—I feel—I feel hot when I think of it. . . . She is a criminal lunatic—she is not to come near you. Do you hear? I shall call Dora and tell her myself.”

“You will give orders in my house?” Sidney said, looking steadily at him, and her gaze

seemed to help him to put forward his feeling more in a form of reason.

“You do not seem—or will not seem to understand. You have had no experience of people like that, scoundrelly people. . . . This woman is not fit for you . . . she is bad, downright bad and she is probably not sane. If she recognizes you, it will be to vent her spite . . . she will connect our names in the vilest way all over London! You will be a Government agent, whom I—for God’s sake, do not let us stay in this miasma any longer!”

Though his vehemence seemed almost unstrung, yet his earnestness convinced her. She bowed her head, whereupon Waveney’s hand was already on the bell. After Dora had received very positive instructions from her mistress, and, looking somewhat puzzled, left the room again, Sidney turned to him with a smile that lightened the tension.

“Are you satisfied?”

He nodded, half-humorous, half-apologetic, and his face relaxed, only to be frozen the next instant with a fresh attention. The bell rang.

He looked at Mrs. Ashburnham, she sat very still. In that silence both could hear Dora’s step at the door of the flat, and the voice, or was it voices, ladies’ voices? that came in when it was opened. They heard the enquiry, it had a peremptory note; and Dora’s low-voiced

and deferential denial. Leaning forward, alert, protective, Waveney seemed hardly to breathe. Then the door closed once more. Dora brought in the cards and with the reading of the names the tension passed; Lord Waveney slowly rose, looked for a match on the mantelpiece, and having found it turned once more toward his companion. "I am satisfied," he said, very quietly, "and now I must run away and dress and talk to stupid people—or no, they are not so stupid as I am, but I am tired! And you,—you are the most obstinate woman!"

She laughed, as they moved toward the door together. On its threshold, he paused to look back.

"I love this room," he said under his breath; then without more words, he took his departure.

CHAPTER XXI

LORD JOHN FILMER had been a familiar figure in English political life for the quarter century preceding the War. He had retained his portfolio through 1914 and 1915—no party desiring to lose his services, singularly ill-defined though these often were. It had been said that he formed the last link with the Victorian era and that this link was one which neither of the War Premiers desired to break. Certainly, it had not been broken by Government. Lord John had resigned, on the discovery by Scotland Yard that his niece, the Lady Claire Winstanley, was involved in a more than questionable black-mailing scandal which had treason as its object, and which had seemed the blossoming of her unsavory career. During the short life of this young woman, adultery and divorce had led by easy descent to more dangerous byways, and the political ruin of her family was not the least tragic of its results.

Her father had been out of office since the Liberals came into power, and it was impossible, on the face of it, for her uncle to remain. Whitehall retains, however, the full share of that common sense which is the ideal of the English-

man and was therefore not disposed to connect, too seriously, the thought of treason with the Filmers. Lady Claire was Lady Claire—every great family had produced and suffered from such undesirable members. Lord John's colleagues, then, were not slow in their assurances that only the present super-heated state of public opinion caused them to accept his resignation; and he had the consolation, if such it were, of finding himself still included in those more vital consultations, by which a few honest, if not very brilliant men, strove and restrove to grasp the reins which War and the Labour Party, running at full gallop, had jerked out of their hands. It was especially during these conferences, that Waveney's observation "The English Government has ceased to function," struck home with greater force.

Lord John's chief characteristic was his colorlessness. He was a neutral carpeting which suited any political complexion; while yet retaining its valuable quality of hard wear. He had judgment; kept regular hours; said very little but listened a great deal. He was never, like Wroxeter, disconcertingly humourous or clever; his manner had a hawklike directness when it swooped upon the subject. He believed himself to be the most democratic of men, but the immobility of his countenance, the unresponsive steadiness of his eye and the icy reserve in

which he enwrapped his existence, always managed to rouse the demagogic elements in Parliament against him. In these historic days, the aristocrat who wished to maintain his influence did so by feigning dependence on the mob and maintaining an effusive affability of demeanour—by which they were sometimes—though not always—deceived. Lord John had been bred in another school and 'could not learn the newer manner. His complete worldly independence was often felt as an offence and Labour had been heard to grumble that a man who owed them so little should have a place in Parliament. It was not the least of Lord John's troubles, that, in 1918, this attitude began perceptibly to be replaced by one of pity and sympathy. He wanted no sympathy from Labour, nor from Ulster, nor from Sinn Fein.

The Filmers had been friends and supporters of Waveney from the beginning. Although he was a Liberal, yet whatever could be done to help him on his way, they did; and that was much. Both brothers liked him and thought him a "wonderful fella." That he should come to their rescue in a prompt and efficient manner on the only occasion when they ever needed it, seemed therefore entirely natural. It could not make the tie closer than it was already, but it transformed this tie into something more personal and that was not wholly to Waveney's

advantage. Few house-parties in the old days when Beddingfield was in its glory, had taken place without him, and in those times such sponsorship was important. Lord John had openly regretted Adrian's marriage and had as openly expressed satisfaction—with his own see-saw inflection—at the removal of the impediment. There was no doubt that, in his mind, he expected Adrian to form a second tie within the confines of their own particular circle. Once safely allied to a family like their own, or the Theydons, Waveney's politics would not matter; but what mattered was that another stone would be safely laid in the dyke which their order was struggling to build against the tide of Socialists and Colonials and Americans which threatened to force them into picturesque uselessness.

Lord John was unmarried. He lived at Queen Anne's Gate with a sister whose passionate devotion to the canine race had caused her to be regarded as the chief deity in the English dog's heaven. It was the Lady Priscilla Filmer who had addressed those impassioned appeals to the public on the subject of rations for dogs and the issuance of a special milk allowance for bitches in whelp. It was the Lady Priscilla who was responsible for the momentous decision that the nose of a Pekingese need not be black, provided it be of proper conformation. It was

the Lady Priscilla whose wolfhound knocked down a frail, little, great Duke in Piccadilly, and Lady Priscilla who refused to have the culprit shot. This lady was far too much concerned with dogs to be especially interested in men; and far oftener to be found in Cabinet consultations with the Doggy-man on Stafford Street, than in reading the War news—but she did her duty, was a Patroness of the Blue Cross, and had established at her own expense a hospital for the care of dogs used as field-messengers.

The visit to Beddingfield and the talk there with Beauvray made an uneasy impression upon Waveney's mind, heightened by the nervous strain which had lately begun to tell upon his health. He was greatly driven by work and possessed by a curious apprehensiveness and an inability to envisage his own situation or to determine the future, due partly to the pressure of world events, now moving with huge strides to a culmination, and partly to his personal uncertainty and anxiety. This personal care preyed upon him the most, and thus he was led to open the subject with Lord John, to whom he felt he could express himself more frankly concerning Lady Claire's inconvenient curiosity than he had felt able to do to her father.

The two men had encountered in Bird Cage Walk on their way through the Parks, a stroll

which easily extended itself to the limits of Kensington Gardens. Lord John, who had never relaxed during the present informal phase one inch of his traditional phylacteries, moved rapidly along, his tall hat gleaming, while he listened to what Waveney had to tell him about Lady Claire Winstanley. This, of course, was only just so much and in just such an order; to suggest the personal aspect of the matter and its bearing on any one else's happiness, was the last thing Adrian wished to do.

"Poisonous woman, m' niece Claire," was Lord John's comment: and Adrien felt relieved, knowing that the weight of his powerful influence would be thrown against any attempt the lady might make at social resuscitation. "If she bothers you, m'dear chap, officially or otherwise, you've my permission to get her locked up. Beauvray can talk as he pleases. She had no right to make friends with Laura Theydon or any other decent Englishwoman. It simply isn't done, and he ought to know it without my tellin' him. I'm sorry it's you she's interfering with at present——"

"It is natural that her dislike of me should be so strong . . . particularly as I tried as a friend, to give her a word of caution after the divorce, but she was bent on self-destruction."

"Beauvray thought——" said Lord John, with his perfect frankness— "that we might have

prevented all this by helping her to get back—after that chap was dead and all. He thinks that the women's cold-shouldering Claire got her desperate and drove her to that crew."

"Oh, but she couldn't," said Adrian simply and Lord John's eye glanced at his companion's abstract expression. Lord Beauvray—as Lord John knew very well—had expected more effort to assist Lady Claire personally from Waveney than from himself. Was it because he thought the former had less right to fastidiousness? Perhaps. At all events, aid had not then been forthcoming, and the above words showed distaste so plainly, that even Lord John felt a jar. After all, lots of women had come a cropper like Claire . . . it was only this later development that made one's attitude so final.

"Laura, now, has been good to her—nice woman Laura Theydon," he proceeded, "very good people, the Theydons."

"Very dull people," said Waveney, who was certainly indiscreet that afternoon. "I often wonder what will become in future of families like that—too inflexible to change—quite useless for the future. They annoy me."

His calm assumption of judgment rather increased Lord John's surprise, although he had often welcomed it on other subjects. Could it be true, what one had heard lately—that Waveney had been going a lot with Americans?

That speech sounded like it. If so—perhaps there was a reason.

“I wanted to ask you about the Ambassadorship—” he began as though his niece and her affairs had been finally disposed of. “I know the influences at work there . . .”

“Which have made it impossible.”

“Quite so. But still, there will be other and probably better chances. Between ourselves, I’m mortally afraid of the President and you know how startling Americans are apt to be. We must have somebody we can trust . . .”

“Get a P.M. you can trust first, my dear Filmer. Until you all do—I am precluded from that situation.”

Lord John pulled out his watch and shook his head. “We must talk, Adrian—but not at the house. I don’t want you there. Already there have been rumours of a Conservative re-crystallization—and if people think we have got hold of you—no, it won’t do . . . Can’t we meet elsewhere?”

In Waveney’s mind lingered the conviction that Lord John and his clan were less important to the public at the moment than he might suppose they were . . . but his own response was immediate. His household was on a War footing, and one never knew these days what one’s cook was going to do . . . but if and when it suited Lord John, dinner could surely be ar-

ranged. He would ask one or two others—Wroxeter perhaps and a lady he had in mind—a long talk could easily follow.

Lord John accepted with the seriousness a dinner engagement demanded, and shortly afterwards the two men parted. That evening Wave-ney rang Mrs. Ashburnham up on the telephone to give her the invitation.

“I want you to meet Lord John,” he explained, conscious of some bewilderment at the other end of the wire. “You’ll like him and it may be useful.”

Amusement made her acceptance a trifle confused; but her vibrant voice comforted Adrian somehow . . . he kept her at the telephone a few moments longer because he clung to the sound. When at length he hung up, it was with the reflection that it was only in her presence he ever had a remission of that nervous tension so annoyingly manifest during his day. If Lord John should like her, it would simplify many things.

If it seems unbelievable that all these things could go on with a total absence in Adrian’s mental vocabulary of the words “love” and “marriage,” one must remember that his dullness was not so strange under the circumstances. He had met her again, really convinced that the emotional side of their relationship was past; really believing that it existed now upon a plane

of friendship merely. That he was desperately in love with her—more in love with her than he had ever been—he really didn't know. The groove in which his life had lain was deep . . . he had not yet stepped out of it.

During the next few days his mood was one of anticipation touched with crisis. Would Lord John get on with her? Was she going to fit in? Adaptable as her race was, one never knew—although one hoped and dreamed. In his fever—for it had become nothing less—Adrian was haunted by a vision of her entrance into the room that symbolized his real life, and of her possession of that room—no less than with wonder that this should be about to come to pass.

CHAPTER XXII

THAT she fitted in—that she fitted in inexpressibly, as no one else had ever fitted in—he knew the instant after her entrance and while they were still moving toward each other across the floor. The slender figure in white, with black head held high, belonged of right to the place, became at once the jewel of that setting. He gathered her hands in his own and held them—they were a little cold—not hastening to speak but bending on her face a gaze at once concentrated and humble—so filled with feeling that her pupils dilated and she drew her hands away. His welcome was but a halting one and he must turn forthwith to meet Lord John and Wroxeter, who had entered together.

“Ah-h,” was the satisfied ejaculation of the latter as he caught the smile of Mrs. Ashburnham. “So here’s a friend of mine!” He bowed formally over Sidney’s hand and then presented Lord John.

The ex-minister was shorter, slighter and paler than the tall, ruddy Wroxeter. His face was seamed with fine wrinkles; his eyes black and quick; his motions of the head when in-

terested, graceful, birdlike. The fine lips were set in a hard line as though carved out of agate . . . life had done this to what had been originally an artist's mouth, sensitive and delicate. Lord John was still agile, swift of movement . . . his simplicity held traces of the grand manner, so that Sidney included him at once in her mental gallery of picturesque individual portraits. In her imagination ever after—and perhaps, who knows? in his own—he was dressed in a velvet coat with lace ruffles, peruke and sword. Lord John did not dispel these illusions by over much talk . . . he never talked a great deal, and he smiled very seldom . . . there had been very little in his life after all to teach him to smile.

Adrian's consciousness of the evening and its events began to fall into a sort of order, vaguely significant in itself and taking possession of his mind, much as a procession with torches and banners passes through an empty street which it fills with the sound of its feet and voices. He seemed detached from, yet abnormally held by them. As the heads of these ideas swung by before his imagination, his nerves became even more tense with an awareness that he was going to have a very important talk later with Lord John; that Wroxeter's eye was quizzical when it rested on himself and Mrs. Ashburnham; that his house was meant for

this sort of thing and made a perfect background for it—but that he must give up the house—which he regretted the more when he saw how *she* looked, moving about it so naturally! What an immense pleasure it gave him to see her pass through his favorite carven doorway, whose thick curtains fell softly behind her—and take her place at table . . . to watch the turn of her small, fine head, the glance that caught his own with a sympathetic quiver . . . to note how her delicate pallor became the colours of the room and the panelling and brocade, which somehow had always rebuked the figure of their original mistress. Englishmen have so strong an attachment to place; so strong an instinct for background, that many spend their lives in composing harmonious and dignified settings for human figures which can never be other than violent or vulgar. It came upon Adrian with a shock that his house had been a shrine without a goddess . . . built to fulfil an ideal to which it had never been dedicated.

He had no estate: his instinct for *locus* was centered in this bit of London earth—which only to-night came to have any meaning and reality for him, just as he must decide to give it up! The thought was bitter to the taste and interfered with his natural geniality.

Mrs. Ashburnham found Lord John delightful. He appealed to her strong sense for the dra-

matic quality in society and of the individualism so marked among its elder members. Her charm met quickly with response; and Lord John expressed his pleasure in it with his customary directness. Meanwhile he enjoyed his surroundings, although he doubtless condemned them as "new." He liked Adrian's pictures and lacquer cabinets and admired the Adam mantelpiece while he ate his dinner.

"Nice room this," he observed, "new, of course, but just what it ought to be . . . Never came here in *her* time, nobody did. But that's all over, and now it ought to be useful to our friend here."

He nodded his head in his host's direction. Mrs. Ashburnham found the remark just a little difficult to answer.

"Yes . . . I suppose it would be hard for Lord Waveney to give it up," was all she finally did say.

"Give it up? Is he givin' it up? I hadn't heard he was givin' it up . . ." said Lord John.

"I mean," she explained, "when he goes to the States . . . if he does . . . as Ambassador."

Lord John drank his wine and shrugged his shoulders ever so slightly.

"I doubt if he goes to the States."

"You mean now?"

"While this crew is in—at all events."

"But why . . . or is it a state secret?"

“There’s no secret in the fact that a decent man really can’t bind himself to do what these people want. The appointment is therefore not likely to be made in any form Adrian can accept.”

“But I thought you prided yourselves in this country on having no political ‘bosses’ and on not binding your people with promises . . .”

“Did you really think that . . .?” His face when he smiled was cynically wrinkled and like old ivory . . . his black eyes grew reminiscent and he hastened to tell a story of his past which contradicted her illusion. When he got back to Waveney and his affairs it was to ask:

“Do you want him to go . . . are you sorry about it . . . why? Do you think he’d be good at the job?”

“Of course I think so! Of course, I am sorry! Aren’t you?”

“You forget I’m a Conservative!”

She made a little scornful gesture. “I do keep forgetting your party lines. And I wish England would forget them and put the right man in the right place sometimes, were he Whig or Tory.”

Her energy made Lord John smile. Then he asked:

“But why are you so sure he’d be good in America?”

“For half a dozen reasons. He is energetic, clear-headed and wise—and sympathetic besides. Most of the men you send——” She paused, fearful of saying the wrong thing but Lord John was encouraging.

“You interest me immensely. The men we send——?”

“Are apt to have been so long in their little diplomatic shrines that they have had no experience of real life. They’ve breathed a special air. We don’t understand or like that . . . Lord Waveney is so unusually clear-headed.”

“Of course he is unusual . . . Your point of view is new to me. Quite so—I see,” Lord John relapsed into a considering silence and she was emboldened to go on.

“Whoever you send, I hope it will be a man who understands the world of work and of affairs. We have no use—though much admiration—for philosophers and essayists and diplomatists with their tremendous ideas of their own importance.”

“Quite so—quite! You have very definite ideas on these subjects and no doubt you may be right—no doubt!” Lord John said smilingly. “Personally, I think Adrian is far too good for the Liberal camp, as it is. Unfortunately, the American Ambassadorship is going to be one of the corner-stones of the new edifice to be

erected after peace comes. It will go to some close friend and follower of the P.M.'s I think, and Adrian doesn't like the Little Man."

"I know he does not," she was impelled to go on. "There are other posts, are there not? Have you thought of them?"

"For him, you mean?" Her interest was so great that Lord John hesitated.

"Yes. If you keep him here, why not make him Permanent Under-Secretary to the Foreign Office?"

Lord John felt his breath quite taken away. His black eyebrows went up to his white hair and his eyes snapped with merriment.

"Well, well, well! Waveney, my dear chap, did you hear this? Mrs. Ashburnham and I are settling your political future . . .!"

His host turned toward him and the talk became more general. Wroxeter had a story to tell about his student days in Cambridge and his tutor who "everlastin'ly preached morality" and whom he had encountered unexpectedly in the Burlington Arcade, "dressed as a layman—wearin' lavender gloves—with a posey in his buttonhole and on his arm the most glor-rious Fairy! whom he was doubtless leadin' to a better and a purer life!" Then he must tell another about the Old Queen—"you Americans do love to hear about Royalty—" which was a little hit

at Mrs. Ashburnham—and how her Majesty's love of cold rooms was nearly the death of her lords and ladies-in-waiting. "We used to hang the thermometer out of window whenever we had the chance and when she came in we'd show it to her . . . 'You see, Ma'am, how very chilly it is,' and then she'd let us warm up a bit." Then they must all three join in an illuminating discussion on the changes which had started in political life before the War—and had been accentuated rather than created by it. That led by direct roads to Ireland, on which Lord John's views were most positive—even ferocious, and where Wroxeter's comments were humourous and Adrian's wise.

Mrs. Ashburnham listened and laughed and applauded, having no unpleasant sense that she had been indiscreet. After dinner—and at the end of a talk with Waveney over their cigars, Lord John drew up his chair to her side again, where she sat near Lord Wroxeter who was contentedly smoking in front of the fire.

"Not at all a bad suggestion that of yours—y'know," Lord John said confidentially. "He'd be a deuced good Permanent Under-Secretary. I shall think of it—although, as you know, I'm out of it all at present."

"Only for so long as you wish to be," she suggested kindly; but his face clouded.

"I fear not—I fear much longer. We all

love it, y'know. The Filmers love politics and always have. 'T wasn't my wish that I ever had to get out of it."

Adrian looked at them more than once, as they sat chatting together. The old man's face was no finer, no clearer cut than Mrs. Ashburnham's. Evidently they got on well; evidently Lord John took to her . . . His own thoughts began to wander down dim, happy vistas, full of vague warmth and colour, where this force—of which just now he felt but as a disturbance—should possess life and lend it richness and beauty. Happiness, tranquillity, the ordered hearth—the music these things were to make against an even deeper, emotional music—yes, these were his need, just as they were every man's need . . . How blind, how deaf he had been not to know!

He pulled himself sharply together—conscious that a mood of reverie hardly becomes a host—and that Wroxeter—that affectionate old cynic, was contemplating the rise of his cigar smoke to the ceiling with an air of concentration that was almost a rebuke.

CHAPTER XXIII

ADRIAN drew his chair closer to the little fire which the coming of November made so pleasant and to which he had added a few billets of wood. Then he began to narrate in his measured way, something, anything which would serve his turn as host. An incident of his recent journey to Stockholm came into his mind: it had all the bizarre quality by which the wildest scientific romancings of the nineteenth century have become the every-day commonplaces of the twentieth, and also cast a new light upon the exhaustion of the Central Empires and their exaggerated terror of the Americans. The other two men joined in, each contributing his share, and Mrs. Ashburnham listened, shading her face from the firelight with her hand.

There was very little light in the library (for the strict rationing of electricity made everybody careful) and most of it came from the small, flickering gleams in the grate. These cast their light upon the dull gold of picture frames and the rich background of books. Heavy curtains, falling in stiff straight folds, shut out the moonless night with its suffusion of mist. London lay very still, dwelling in a muffled pause

. . . no country park could have seemed more quiet: it gave Sidney a nervousness for which she could not readily account. There was nothing tense now in the atmosphere of the room; Adrian's voice was calm and modulated and beyond its range the house held a silence that seemed almost lifeless. Thus she did not fail to hear the vibration of the front door bell and the servant's step as he crossed the hall to attend to its summons. There was a pause—the closing of a door—voices—footsteps. She wondered if the old cabby she had engaged to call for her had come before his time——

“The Lady Claire Winstanley!”

This announcement produced a sudden quivering silence in the group gathered about the fire. As he made it, the butler's hand switched on the lights and the figure which lingered as if irresolute on the threshold was thus thrown into strong relief. It could not have been stranger—to the eyes turned simultaneously upon it—this strangeness was the most salient impression. The figure was of a young woman painfully thin, with arms that jerked and waved themselves about as if they belonged to a marionette. She wore the rich, straight, semi-evening dress in the fashion of the period . . . it was of black satin, heavily ornamented with beads and copper and silver threads . . . but

this handsome, costly garment was fastened all awry, so that a flap dangled loose from the shoulder and the rest was pulled crookedly over her meagre bosom. Her head was bare: the light hair twisted upon it was half-dressed with ends sticking up and the jewelled comb thrust in anyhow . . . and the whole had a faintly tremulous motion exceedingly unpleasant to witness. The face was heavily painted, and, as it was thrust forward under the light, one marked a dull purplish flush underlying the pigment. The pupils of the eyes were dilated so that the iris had diminished to a thread . . . The mouth was frightened . . .

This apparition stood for an instant, turning that trembling head hither and yon as though in search . . . and then took a staggering step forward and spoke:

“Uncle John . . . There’s a man following me! He’s following me! Uncle John, are you there?”

Lord John suppressed a groan as he quietly arose. This sudden evocation of the family curse, thrusting itself into the peaceful room, was almost more than he could bear. Waveney also rose—and moved instinctively to the side of Sidney’s chair. Lord Wroxeter alone remained seated, continuing to smoke on with the most admirable tranquillity, as if the servant

had brought in letters or announced a waiting taxi-cab. No one answered the voice, and it proceeded, half terrified, half entreating:

“Dogging me . . . he’s been dogging me all afternoon on Bond Street—while Laura and I went shopping—yes, I promised not to go—but one’s got to have *clothes*, y’know, whatever you men say . . . Madame Charles frightened me . . . and I had to take my medicine——”

“How’d you find out I was here?” asked Lord John, in a voice like steel.

“Laura told me to go straight home—but how could I go home with that *spy* dogging me . . . dogging me . . . following my taxi wherever it went . . . and Madame Charles warned me! So I went to Queen Anne’s Gate and you had gone . . . and they said you were here . . . so I came. I couldn’t throw him off . . . he’s there still . . . Send him away!”

Her voice was full of weird inflections, now shrill, now hoarse . . . seemingly beyond the owner’s will.

“I shall take you home,” said Lord John. “Adrian—is the cab still there?”

“*He’s* still out there . . . waiting!” crowed Lady Claire, and something evil shone in her eyes and in the mouth which became fixed in a terrified grin.

“I won’t go, Uncle John, unless you speak to him . . . not a step, do you hear? Beside

—I'm tired. Yes, I know I promised not to take my medicine . . . but this time I had to take it . . . couldn't have come here without my medicine . . . I needed it . . .”

There was a hurried interchange between Lord John and the butler . . . “Is there any man there, do you know?”

“No man but the taxi-driver, m'lord, that I can see . . . yes, I've looked, m'lord—there's nobody.”

And still the voice went on and on: “It was Winstanley's spirit that warned me first . . . And Mme. Charles told me the most awful things—she warned me of danger——”

The woman laid both hands together over her mouth—and looked out over them—a sickening spectacle of terror.

“We shall go together,” Lord John said. “Come Claire!”

But Lady Claire had drawn a step nearer to the fire, and turning her head, seemed to listen for some noise without. She nodded, suddenly capriciously, at Waveney.

“He's still out there you know!” she remarked confidingly. “He's from Scotland Yard—one of their spies—they watch me all the time—idiots!” she giggled; and then her voice turned sharply angry: “It was *you*—you set them on me, first—you let them put me in that place—yes—it was *you*.”

“Come, Claire,” Lord John kept repeating, but his authoritative accent failed to reach her drug-bewildered mind. The sight of Adrian and the connection of his name with all that she had suffered seemed to act as an excitant. She made one of her staggering steps forward while her voice shrilled:

“It was *you*—I shall never forget—you set them on me first of all—you made my father and uncle consent to putting me with that doctor—cruel—cruel!” She beat her hands together—“you brought that horrible woman spy to my bed and forced me—forced me——”

If only Adrian had remained where he stood—absolutely quiet! But as this frantic creature came toward him, pulling away from her uncle who had her by the arm—he instinctively moved aside, and by this movement the light from the tall lamp behind him streamed full on Mrs. Ashburnham’s white face as she sat frozen in her chair. The other’s speech was cut off short and then burst from her in a yell that was one of sheer delirium.

“There she is—there she is—the spy—the spy! The dark woman, Mme. Charles warned me—and here she is, a Scotland Yard spy!” She spun suddenly around on Waveney, her face working: “So this is my security—my poor father’s security? So she wasn’t any Government agent but your agent—living in

your house is she? Living with *you* is she . . . ?”

“Oh God—what filth!” cried Lord John in a passion of helpless disgust; but he was beside his niece to catch her when she fell. They got her into the cab somehow; the drug had begun to stupefy her already and her limbs refused support. Lord John got in beside her, and as the cab moved away, Adrian could hear that her raving had changed into whimpering . . . all about her medicine and Mme. Charles and the danger that threatened her from a dark lady . . .

When the cab had disappeared, Adrian sick-hearted, shut the door of his house behind him and re-entered his library, moving mechanically toward where the two figures still sat and where Wroxeter still composedly smoked, stretching his long legs tranquilly toward the dying fire.

“Cheerful young lady, that!” was his comment. “Well, Adrian, as you were sayin’ before this totally unnecessary interruption——”

CHAPTER XXIV

THIRTY-SIX hours after this incident, a large limousine from London drew up at the door of "The Larches," which was the name of Dr. Grenville Frere's exclusive and retired sanitarium for the care of drug addicts at Cobham, in order to deposit in his care for the second and last time in her life, the Lady Claire Winstanley. Lord John took her down himself after a very full and painful conversation with Lord Beauvray. The two sat together in the morning-room at Beddingfield and the elder brother listened with pinched lips and haggard eyes to the other's caustic and unimpassioned account of the occurrence.

" 'Tisn't only the—er—filth of the thing," Lord John proceeded, "and the danger she runs and all . . . it's the goin' back on our word that I mind, y'know. The Yard's furious . . . says you haven't kept the bargain. She was to stay home only if we *never* let her out of our sight and all the rest of it . . . To have her dodgin' round Bond Street among all the French dressmakers and fortune-tellers—well, it's too much, Beauvray, on my word, it is!"

“It’s sickening . . .” the other muttered, “and she had promised me——”

“Claire’s promise!” There was a world of scorn in Lord John’s voice and Beauvray responded only by a despairing gesture. Then, an idea coming to his mind, he asked dully:

“But Laura—how about Laura Theydon? When she left here they were together and I thought——”

“Oh she slipped away from Laura easily enough . . . Claire’s damned cunning when it comes to the morphia. That witch-woman scared her badly and so she had to have her “medicine,” and she let Laura put her into a cab to come home—and she thought she was bein’ followed——”

“And was she——”

“No doubt she was,” Lord John replied bluntly enough, but Beauvray drew himself up in his chair, his face quivering.

“Damned impertinence, I call it, if my daughter——”

“My dear boy, we’ve lost the right to take that tone,” said his brother in icy reproof. “Remember, it ain’t a private question. Claire could go and spend a week at Margate with any cad in town and it was only Winstanley’s affair, but when she gets to pumpin’ me for information about the Navy to sell to a black-mailing *Hun*——”

"I know—I know——" Lord Beauvray's endurance was pitifully limited and even his outraged and humiliated brother saw that he could stand but little more.

"Sorry to be harsh, old man," he said in a different tone and went over to the mantelpiece for a match. When his cigar was alight he turned again to face his brother and stood—a stately figure enough, his hands behind his back, on the hearth-rug.

"You musn't forget that I've paid something myself over this business," he continued, his voice not unkindly; "but that's not the reason which makes me say Claire must go back to that vet. in Cobham and stay there, if I have to take her myself. I'm not doin' much talkin' about the family either—you know that—but the Filmers don't do these things. Charitably speaking, I'll agree, if you like, that Claire's not sane and that since she came that cropper she's not responsible. Quite so—then it's up to us—that's that. Can't have her trackin' me into dinner-parties, and flingin' Billingsgate and calling people names, y'know. It simply won't do."

Lord Beauvray made no reply to this obvious truism and after a pause Lord John added:

"The way she shouted at that Mrs. Ashburnham—and, by the way, she kept at it all the way home in the taxi when she wasn't sobbin'. Seemed positive the lady was the nurse that

was here—who worried a confession out of her.”

“I suppose it was just a delusion, or delirium?”

“So I thought—so I think, only it puzzles me. Who is this Mrs. Ashburnham anyway?”

The elder man crowed a faint little laugh before he answered: “Are you asking me, John? How do I hear about anyone these days? If I have imprisoned Claire, she has imprisoned me as well.”

“Thought you might have heard. There was a V.C. of that name—died I think—Wroxeter was a friend of hers evidently—if that means anything.”

“Nothing much—unless he’s changed since the War,” was Beauvray’s comment, at which Lord John even chuckled a little.

“Well, he wasn’t as taken as Adrian was—Adrian was *hooked* that was all . . . Charmin’ lady, too, American I believe. What was that nurse like?”

“I never saw her, John—she came and went, and only Adrian and the servants saw her. He answered for her discretion, I remember, but I thought it risky at the time. None of these agents are people I’d trust. Now I come to think of it, I remember Morton tellin’ me he thought she was an American—very quiet, he said, and quite the lady.”

“Odd—that’s a bit odd!” Lord John’s brow wrinkled and he studied the end of his cigar. “I’d not have thought of it only Claire was so devilish persistent, y’see—actin’ as if she recognized the woman. You can’t tell me anything more about her?”

“Only when Adrian was here I asked him if she could be trusted; he got quite vexed and was rather short with me. I thought it was odd, John, at the time . . .”

“Hmpp!” Lord John made an ejaculation expressive both of suspicion and annoyance. He said nothing further to his brother at the moment, turning the conversation back at once to the subject of his niece’s immediate treatment and his own plans for handling her journey. But the idea remained in one of the lower layers of his consciousness as containing a possible criticism of Waveney, which was the first he ever remembered to have made. It was a small thing—just a vague annoyance mingled with a suspicion of a something, which to his mind “isn’t done.” It altered imperceptibly, but very decidedly, his attitude toward Mrs. Ashburnham herself—casting as it were upon the radiant charm of her figure, the shadow of a possible class distinction. If the lady with whom he had dined *en petit comité* in Adrian’s home, were really a Government secret agent in whom Adrian was personally interested, why, of course

she became at once another person and set into another category. Moreover, Adrian himself became set in another category.

Lord John was as little self-conscious as men of his sort are apt to be, and more than that he was a man of wide experience; but this incident had been sufficient to arouse, for the first time, that awareness that Adrian was not a born Peer, but a made Peer, the son of a barrister, and not even "one of us," i.e., a Conservative. Adrian, then, had not felt the importance of the Filmer family enough to have prevented such an incident. Perhaps Claire, bewildered though she might be, was right? Then, if that were the case, the whole incident was "damned disagreeable," and asking him to dine had been a "damned impertinence." Yet surely Waveney, that man of the world, was not the person to make the *faux pas* of any blundering, newly ennobled cheesemonger? It was all very perplexing, and bothered Lord John not a little as he motored back from Beddingfield. His impulse had first been to go to Adrian and openly question him concerning the matter, but, on second thoughts, he decided to say nothing. He had enough to do, he told himself savagely, with making all the arrangements for the reception of his niece into the sanitarium at Cobham. But the idea and the shade of suspicion attached to the idea remained

in his mind, and in Lord Beauvray's mind, and were sufficient to exercise a decided influence over their attitude toward Waveney later on. Unfortunately, it was just the sort of idea that would most effect the minds of people like these people, whose pride had been already severely hurt. Trifling as it was, it held the possibility of disingenuousness on Adrian's part, and a suggestion of his real attitude toward the Filmer family, which dissolved obligation as by an insidious acid. There is no doubt that from this moment the influence of the Filmer family—in any important political sense—was lost to Adrian, and it was to prove a very serious loss. Lady Claire and her morphia were not without their effect upon the history of England.

At that moment, however, Lord John's opinion was the least of Adrian's preoccupations. The incident distressed him beyond measure—jangling those taut fibres of nervous vitality which were already stretched beyond their limit. If anybody's attitude towards it worried him more than his own, it was not that of Lord John but that of Sidney Ashburnham. That she should be shaken by so grim an encounter was natural enough—but her frozen silence had carried in it something beyond mere disturbance, something more profound, more fatal. The remaining minutes of her stay in his house had spent themselves awkwardly in forced talk between

Wroxeter and himself; and when her cab was announced she had openly welcomed it. Adrian waved aside the elder man's offer to escort her to her home and followed her into the cab quite unheeding her faint protest. The driver turned his shaky, old horse and the two within could have seen, had they wished, the typical, tall figure of Lord Wroxeter, hat in hand—making gestures of farewell with a particularity that showed his concern. Waveney marked the disappearance of his stately silhouette around the curve of the Square and turned again to his companion. Her eyes were half closed: she looked as if she were about to faint. On his bending over her, she murmured a word or two . . . he saw she needed but a moment of quiet to restore her. Anxiously, he let down the window so that the cool, damp night wind should blow against her face; and after a pause he ventured to say, very quietly:

“Of course, you realized that it was raving insanity? The woman is quite, quite mad; you know that? Mental disease was responsible.”

She breathed a vague assent, but shuddered. “Yes—yes—I know—I know—but oh! her dreadful words! Her horrible face and all—all it meant to me!”

“If only I could have spared you!”

“You could not—how could you?”

“Promise me you will not think of it—not let it trouble you—promise me!”

“How can I promise—how can I help it?”

The wave of agitation which overwhelmed her, began to flow into his heart, till he was helpless—like a swimmer borne down by a flood. His hand found hers in the darkness, closed over it, clung to it. Their movement through the universe was swift . . . and all the while he realized that the cab jogged soberly onward through the darkened streets. His own helplessness caught him by the throat. There seemed no words in which to explain—to comfort. The cab stopped. He followed her up to her apartment as a matter of course and she did not forbid him. When the little room sprang into light . . . so tranquil, so studious, yet so feminine and breathing of herself, it seemed to release his speech in an anguish of feeling.

“Sidney—Sidney!”

He moved toward her, but she shrank back leaving her hands cold in his own.

“Oh not again! Not again!” she cried in a breaking voice . . . “How can you—when you remember? Have you no memory—of all that pain?” and her words were lost in tears.

“I remember no pain—only an exquisite joy—that I had to tear out of my heart because I had no right to cherish you there. No right—in honour, I had no right . . .”

She wept on desperately.

"How could I do otherwise . . . ? You were alone, unprotected . . . I couldn't be a dastard . . . bring you sorrow . . ." His thread was lost in the face of her suffering and he could only repeat, "sorrow—sorrow!"

"And that woman—that horrible, horrible woman—she brought it all back to me! How can you recall it now?"

"I didn't love you then, you know it—as I love you now . . . I couldn't ask you then to be my wife, as I can now! You have seen how it is with me these last weeks!"

She only reiterated: "How can you? Ah, how can you?" as if his words were more than she could bear. With her trembling hands still fast in his own, he struggled for steadiness; and his feeling when he spoke was dominated by an utter sincerity in which she could not choose but believe.

"Why do we waste time on what is past? . . . When we are calmer you will see—and understand and forgive me if I need it . . . Now, now, you must know my love, my fear of you . . . I did not speak before, because I had too much to lose——"

Her imploring gesture checked him, "Oh do not—do not say any more—I—I am afraid—I cannot bear it!"

"Sidney—you loved me then."

“Then—then! Oh yes, I loved you—how I loved you . . .” she seemed to thrust the words from her with violence . . . “But you did not come, and everything was different; and lately—lately I have come to feel intensely that after all, I am a stranger—a stranger who is not of your world.”

“Not of my world! You *are* my world.”

“No—no!”

A wave of pallor overspread her face and even her lips whitened. She swayed as if about to fall, but stiffened, having one thought only, that if his arm went about her as it had done once before—— She drew away, staggered over to a chair and sat down, resting her tormented forehead upon her hands.

“I beg of you to go,” she implored him; “I can stand no more—nothing more!”

He stood awhile, helplessly, and then with a gesture of mere obedience to her wishes, he very reluctantly left her.

CHAPTER XXV

THE telephone message received by Miss Rendall at her hotel on the day following that of Lord Waveney's dinner-party, was of a quality somewhat different from those to which she had been accustomed from her friend Mrs. Ashburnham. Up to the present in their friendship, the dependence had been all on one side and Mildred could not but feel a novel sense of affectionate importance, when Dora's respectful voice kept reiterating that Mrs. Ashburnham *did* hope nothing might prevent her from coming.

She hurried to Farm Street, where she found Sidney, hugging the fire in a long straight tea-gown which made her look paler than ever. The look with which she greeted Mildred was listless and weary and her eyes were darkened as though from sleeplessness. In response, however, to the other's devoted enquiries, she avowed to a nervous chill and a bad night following on a startling and disagreeable experience, which had left her feeling decidedly shaky. What the experience was she did not say, and somehow Mildred felt that she could not ask. What Sidney wanted of her, as she soon discovered, was something more definite than a

visit of sympathy—nothing less, indeed, than that they should take the first steps in search of a passport that very day.

This decision was so entirely unprepared for that Mildred found herself perplexed in mind. She began, innocently enough, to interrogate her friend as to the reasons for her sudden change of front—taking, from conscientiousness, the opposite side of the matter and recapitulating to Sidney all those same objections to the journey which Sidney had been wont to make to her. Mrs. Ashburnham could only shake her head, and then, to Mildred's great distress, she suddenly hid her face and burst into bitter sobbing. So violent a storm of weeping in one generally so cool and composed, indicated that her underlying disturbance had been profound; and Mildred, with her arm about the shaken shoulders, began to be conscious of alarm. But though Sidney freely wept, she gave no explanation of her tears, and her friend was too fond of her to do aught but pity and soothe. They spent the day together. Mrs. Ashburnham's emotion once relieved, she regained her self-possession and was soon able to set forth on a round which began at Grosvenor Gardens and went on to include the Home Office and Cockspur Street. She learned that the sailing was expected in a few days of a "women and children's ship"—by which was meant a liner suffi-

ciently speedy to minimize the danger from submarine attack. If she could not get passage thereon, it might be weeks ere she could get another chance. About a passport the Home Office was non-committal—rules were rules—and Englishwomen were not supposed to travel. At the same time, the widow of Colonel Ashburnham, V.C.—American born and on a business trip—could count on due consideration and would receive whatever chance arose. The two therefore returned to luncheon with a feeling that the situation was promising at least.

Sidney, though looking far from well, seemed to have regained steadiness, and, when later in the afternoon, Gervase Fallon was announced, bearing a portfolio of sketches made in Russia and wearing his customary half-shy, yet faintly cynical smile, Mildred felt that she might safely depart. Her expression, as she walked rapidly through Berkeley Square, was both puzzled and grave; and, as she mounted Hay Hill, she was already occupied in dictating to herself the letter that she determined to write that evening, containing a full account of the matter for George.

Fallon was interesting and interested on hearing that his hostess hoped ere long to go to the States. He had work there himself, he told her. One of the great newspaper syndicates had asked him to attend the Peace Conference—

which everybody now expected would be summoned not later than the spring—as their special representative and correspondent. Already, wires were being pulled and fish were being got ready for the frying-pan. He knew of one or two smaller nations whose diplomatic representatives were already packed and ready—at the first hint of an armistice, to rush, to London or Paris and present their claims. One would have to go to the States first—because one would never get there afterwards once things began to happen.

So Fallon talked on, and Sidney listened—until his next appointment took him away. He was followed—a little late for tea—by Lord Wroxeter, whose greeting: “And how are you to-day, my dear?” was one in which the old-fashioned gallantry was but the cloak of a genuine solicitude. Somehow, it was easier to talk to Wroxeter than to Mildred Rendall. One hardly knew why. His long figure at ease in his chair while he smoked; his big, smooth hand with the rings on it; his immovable countenance filled with knowledge of men and women and of tolerance for their weakness and failure; the repose, the confidence one felt in his good-breeding; the strength of his irremediable gentlemanliness—all these brought her help and comfort. This elderly, exotic survival of the Victorian order, and with most of its reprobated

failings—what a friend he was! How sensible! How loyal!

“ ‘Course, I know how you must be feelin’ ” was his comment, “ beastly affair, what? Poisonous female that—mad as a hatter, my dear! Don’t know what the Filmers are doing to let her trot around like that. Takin’ you for some spy or other—good Lord! Too absurd to let it bother you.”

Sidney assured him that it didn’t, while yet showing so very plainly that it did. At the same time, she unfolded the business which was calling her home, and was grateful for the directness with which he accepted her statements, while giving no sign in his dignified expression that he knew of any other reason than the one she was giving him, for a voyage overseas at the present time. She read him George Rendall’s letter and handed him Mr. Peter Sampson’s two cablegrams, in justification of asking his help with the Home Office regarding the passport. Certainly, in Lord Wroxeter’s opinion, the chance to secure fortune in America needed no justification. He had all the belief of the Englishman of his caste, that the chief duty of the United States was to supply such chances. To his mind, the journey was a matter of simple necessity, one far outweighing any consideration of sentiment. Had Mrs. Ashburnham asked his aid, for example, to go to see an

ailing parent, he would doubtless have reminded her of what "isn't done," and have suggested that all such matters as family affection must give way in War-time. But money was a different matter, and there was no one, he felt, he would rather see with plenty of money than his little friend Mrs. Ashburnham. He liked her heartily; liked her for her poise, her looks, her clothes and her humour, liked her because, although his manner to her might be caressing, he was well aware that it must never be too caressing. And above all he liked her because, as the years went on, a lonely man—be he Peer or commoner—grows more and more dependent on the welcome at a friend's hearth.

Of course she must get a passport. When he once made up his mind as to a given course, Lord Wroxeter's manner had a finality which carried weight, and Sidney could hardly have found, in the whole world of London influence, a personality of more value in coming to her aid. He put on his eye-glasses, he spread the cablegrams out before him; he read them aloud in his cultivated articulation and with that balanced sagacity and air of business shrewdness of which he privately fancied himself the embodiment. And his conclusion was that he should see about the permit at once.

"Y'know there's no telling about this crew—what they'll do or who they will favour.

There's no telling at all. But we'll see what can be done. And then, you have other friends, y'know. How about them? It all helps, and Waveney could do far more than I can."

"I had rather not ask him."

Over his glasses he looked very kindly at her white face.

"He'll do anything, y'know," he said with deliberate emphasis; "he's a wonderful fella—Adrian. And he'll do anything you ask him, my dear."

"But you see, I—I don't want him to know."

Lord Wroxeter removed his glasses, polished them and replaced them in their case. He then resumed his cigar, fixing his eyes on a corner of the ceiling. He had an air of waiting which it was impossible to ignore.

"Let's talk about something else," she said, and there was pain in her voice.

Lord Wroxeter shrugged, but he obeyed her wish. His mind, as he later slowly proceeded along Mount Street, was full of regret in which there was little curiosity and less surprise. With women, his own relations had ever followed the primal order—desire, satisfaction and satiety—departing from it only in one respect: that he invariably tried to be friends with the lady afterwards and usually with the most disastrous results. In Adrian's situation, as conceived by him, the most unnecessary complica-

tions existed, which, though he could not define, yet he could perceive to be the cause of quite superfluous pain and misunderstanding. Yet he was very sympathetic and always sentimental, and probably in all London there was no one more capable of viewing with comprehension the vicissitudes of this exceedingly modern love affair. Why was Mrs. Ashburnham running away? His sympathy carried him far enough to ring up Waveney's private number at the Foreign Office; but Parker at the other end was vague and gave him to understand only that his lordship was out of town.

CHAPTER XXVI

IN point of fact, Waveney was out of town in a political and Pickwickian sense rather than in a literal one. He had returned home that night in a very disturbed state of mind, had not expected to sleep, had not slept, but instead had marked the slow wheeling of the hours, each bringing its fresh problem which he was unable to resolve. The disorientation of his life had reached a point where even the landmarks were strange to him. More than that, he had lost confidence, for the time being, in his own power of control. Nothing had turned out as he had hoped . . . and the fabric so smoothly, so intellectually planned, so that it should be a weave of even and perfect texture showing nothing but success—had become a tangled web of broken threads. Fate had snarled the skein using those very forces of emotion which he had always believed himself capable of guiding to his own ends. He, who had always acted on the assumption that in the life of the wise there are no tragedies, became suddenly convinced of his own utter helplessness. Surely, it would have been saner if he had trusted his whole career to the blind Madonna of Chance. What use of prove-

nance and prudence, of tact and care? With all his precaution, that was abroad which he most desired to keep hidden, and he had failed utterly in what he chiefly desired to accomplish.

Sidney's pained rebuff had been unexpected. He had turned his gaze upon her as upon the past and looked to see the face quivering with passionate response which he had never forgotten. This illusion vanished with the rest . . . in the black spaces of despairing night it mocked at him. Here was but another failure, founded on his first costly renunciation. Yet—he asked himself with incredulous bitterness, had he deserved the outcome? He had put the woman he loved beyond his reach for her sake as well as his own. Now, his world was but an empty stage, background to nothing; his activity was emptiness and led but to a vacant and a pompous goal.

This mood of introspection was exceedingly foreign to a nature like Adrian's and was in itself indicative of the strain upon his nerves. His susceptibility to it annoyed him. All through his life he had met disappointment with a shrug, the failure of a given plan with tranquil re-adjustment. Not the least of his trials, when he arose after this torment, was the anxious consciousness that he had lost the wish to shrug—that what concerned Sidney and himself had bitten below the power of tranquil re-adjust-

ment. His first action, after day had really crept over the house-tops, was to write her an imploring letter. While doing so, he became aware that his head felt unnatural, his body strange—which symptoms he laid to his sleep-ness night—and so thrust the note into his pocket to be addressed and posted later on, after he had breakfasted.

Parker came before he had finished his coffee, bringing the mail, papers and a list of engagements indicating a heavy day. Adrian summoned himself to deal with these; but just as he was leaving the house, he was seized with vertigo and would have fallen but for his secretary's arm. The attack was short and passed off in half-an-hour, when he insisted, rather against Parker's advice, on proceeding to Whitehall in a taxi.

There he met with unusual demands upon his energy, for the news had been the cause of restless activity in all departments. Talk was now of the future, of individual schemes and ambitions, of promises on the eve of fulfilment and of changes awaiting their hour. As the day waned, he went over to the House of Commons to hear the Premier announce important news; he marked how Fact had outdone Rumor and how the atmosphere was pregnant with crisis. . . . The corridors hummed with excitement. . . . Then he went back to the Lords and sat while

the debate droned on. Either it was particularly dull or his head was: he became irritated, impatient, marvelling at the familiar lack of alertness in the expression of his colleagues. One or two faces glanced at him, marking his notable pallor, which shone white against the scarlet and dull-gold framework—and wondering perhaps what the cause of it might be.

The second attack of vertigo was much more severe and prolonged than the first. Had it not been for Lord Welden, who carried him home quickly and quietly in his motor, Waveney would have found that haven difficult to reach. By morning his illness was evident, and the doctor was summoned, who commanded rest in no uncertain manner. How ill he might be, the physician either could or would not say. There was great exhaustion—nervous and physical. Such breakdowns were by no means uncommon and were of two sorts . . . those which resulted merely from the effects of outside strain and overwork . . . and those where the cause lay deeper, in some organic deterioration. The first type was indicated here, but no one could be certain at the present stage.

All that week, Adrian lay dull and drowsy: too weak, too cloudy to gather into definite questioning, the vague thoughts floating through his troubled consciousness. He dozed but could not sleep much; he was perpetually struggling

against some overwhelming current, which tended to carry him farther and farther from shore. He suffered no pain, but sickness and distress; he could express nothing but the sense of work unfinished, of questions unanswered and tasks undone. He was constantly sending Parker to answer the telephone—the message was never the one that he desired. He did not dream, of course, that his letter to Sidney Ashburnham had lain in his pocket until Parker saw fit to place it—as it was sealed, yet bore no address—among the other papers on his desk.

There were plenty of kind telephone enquiries, there were flowers and messages and notes. An elderly relation conceived it her duty to come down, stay a day or two, and look to the sick man's comfort. But many of his friends, foreseeing the near approach of busier days—had snatched the chance of a country-visit and among them was Lord Wroxeter.

There came a day, when Adrian felt stronger; the rest had begun to take effect and the doctor spoke cheerfully. . . . He was allowed to sit up and glance at the papers . . . and, although the doctor shook his head when Adrian asked for the telephone, yet the patient's eyes had a look of such impatience, such trouble, that he felt it would be wiser to yield. . . .

Dora's voice, when finally he succeeded in getting the number to answer, was a perplexed one

—choked with tears. Didn't his lordship know? Mrs. Ashburnham had tried her very best to tell everybody . . . but then everything had been so uncertain; one did not know from day to day what was going to be the result. And then—when the papers had actually appeared—they had all been in such a rush! Of course, she had meant to leave a good-bye message, and she had sailed for the States yesterday morning.

CHAPTER XXVII

AN illness is like an ocean voyage; when at last one makes a safe port, it is to find oneself in a strange country. The six weeks of Waveney's inaction were fraught with more changes than his life had ever known. Armistice Day, with its riot of rejoicing had come and gone; the world had closed the red volume and had begun to read the black. But this change affected him less than he had feared it would . . . decision was taken out of his hands by the event nor could he deny that it was a relief. He spent a long November in the New Forest, quite alone, and if not happy, at least in peace. This was his first pause for over six years, and as his breakdown had been due to that long overwork—plus the background of strain, and as he was constitutionally a sound man—his recovery was not delayed.

When at length he returned to his desk, it was to a situation altogether different from that he had left. By his illness—although perhaps not more than by his previous attitude—he had lost any chance of a post on the new formed Peace Commission. Lord John might have put him forward by a word, but Adrian knew why Lord John had not spoken that word and would

not speak it. Wroxeter, whose shrewdness was no greater than his frankness and who stood with Lord Beauvray and the Filmers on their own level—Wroxeter had left Adrian in no doubt as to their attitude.

“They’re proud, old chap,—they’re all proud, and your danglin’ the family skeleton is more than they like to see,” he had observed, and he was right.

Thus Waveney, during that fateful winter, was only the able man who must take his chance, and one, moreover, whose chance was not where it had been. A General Election had confirmed in power the group of men for whom he felt no sentiment but distrust . . . and his more theoretical intellectual point of view accentuated that distrust and told against him. During the War his efficiency and tact had been drawn upon every day—every hour—but that page once turned, the old greed, the old party-passion, crowded back, and these qualities might very well be overlooked or forgotten. His post in the Foreign Office was assured to him as long as he chose to remain in it—but promotion was no longer certain, and in the drama now being staged at Paris, he was not given a speaking part. No doubt he would be called upon to disentangle whatever skein his superiors might snarl: and he felt without bitterness that Destiny had merely resolved his perplexities for

him, according to her own quite uncomplimentary fashion.

Meanwhile, he had received a very good offer to let his house, furnished, which relieved him of other anxieties. Certain rich influential Americans, brought to London by the present exigency, were only too glad to secure a background for their social activities at once so dignified as to be typically English, while yet not lacking in that comfort and convenience to which they were accustomed in their own land. The rental was sufficient to ease Waveney's mind, and he signed the lease with relief. At the same time, he ironically reflected that the title, to gain which he doubtless owed his illness, thus became a whimsical bestowal on a landless, childless man for whom its dignities threatened to be naught but a burden. Certainly Burcote, the little Kentish village where he was born and whose name had been added to his for want of an estate—Burcote knew no Waveney and was not likely to know one. Adrian began to think of his home as a renounced dream—something to be definitely thrown overboard during the voyage he proposed to make. If this lease led to a sale, he was ready. He meant to marry Sidney Ashburnham, and, after marriage, he could even less afford to live in Smith Square than to-day.

To this one thought, their marriage, he re-

curred again and again, as one clings to the only hope which should make life worth living. In his anaemic folly he had let her slip—had let pass the chance of happiness, of creating a warm, a real nucleus of life, from which alone, as he had come lately to realize, it drew meaning and value. His hesitation had been the effect of his world—had sprung from immemorial questions of prudence and expediency which he took to be the part of wisdom—and while he hesitated, she had fled. He knew very well that this journey was a flight. In the truth of that lay his only comfort—she would surely not have fled unless she loved him. He had read that love in her troubled eyes . . . and now she was gone.

Unfortunately, at the moment he could not follow her. One could not leave the bridge just as the sorely battered ship was making harbour—especially, one could not leave when one had failed to receive promotion. Though all the others were dashing greedily about, each bent on his own ends, Waveney must stay at his post. Illness had kept him away too long already. No: he could not take ship for the States much as he longed to do so. . . . Work, the only panacea, the only stimulant, must be well done, proudly done, because we stand for what we are. The spectacle which Adrian presented during this trying winter: that of a man stead-

fastly in his place, was one carrying conviction into unknown quarters. There never seemed a time when the self-seeker was so omnipresent . . . the reaction from the spirit of sacrifice seemed almost violent. Everybody demanded everything . . . and most of all to stop work. Only Lord Waveney, though he might accomplish little, remained at his desk. He comforted himself and sustained his spirit by long letters to an American address—letters which he struggled to keep to the tone of calm intimacy.

Often, during the pauses in our lives, when we seem to ourselves to count for little, to have been stranded into inaction by some adverse eddy of that current which should have carried us on to fortune—often at such times we store, though all unconsciously, the energy for a fresh advance. Waveney's attitude toward Government must have made itself felt invisibly but powerfully, as his work made itself felt. He was too good for them—he belonged to the future. What was not known was his attitude toward Party: his sympathies were generally supposed to have drifted into Conservative channels. This was the usual evolution of the ennobled Liberal. The doubt of it, in his case, was the immediate reason for a visit which was paid to Lord John Filmer, in his study at Queen Anne's Gate, by Mr. James Spangler, the prominent Labour Member.

The interview must have drawn picturesque-ness from the highly coloured personalities taking part in it. Spangler was one of those heavy-footed minds, often highly astute in their way, which have had so favourable a reaction to the forces behind English life. They would be impossible, politically speaking, in any other country. Their slowness, the rumbling of their psychological machinery at the insertion of any new idea, is there synonymous with security. That quick means shallow, that cleverness is a taint—these are fundamental beliefs in those English eyes who regarded Spangler as unquestionably sound. To him, contrast Lord John, pale, fine, colourless and even romantic, perfectly affable because perfectly removed, and perfectly removed because he was Lord John Filmer. Mr. Spangler was a man of heavy, rugged frame and stolid features. One imagined him saying, “Me lord, I hope I see you well?” with the inward comment: “He can be naught to me as I can be naught to him—” which is the underlying assumption of class distinctions.

Equally well, can one imagine Lord John’s greeting: “How are you, Mr. Spangler, how are you?” full of the simplicity and heartiness with which a Filmer always greeted a person in another class. Incidentally it should be added that it was Lord John, not Mr. Spangler,

who perfectly saw that the political future belonged to the latter. This accounts for more than it shows.

The two had a good deal to say, and the conversation went on awhile—Spangler mumbling slowly along after his crisp and non-committal host—until the real subject, for which both had been waiting, finally came out. Spangler regarded Lord John as the inevitable leader of the Tory party—if there should ever be one in future. Labour had tended to incline more toward the Tories—whose faults and virtues they knew—than toward that shifting and shallow Liberalism by which they had felt themselves betrayed. This was a tentative period during which plans must be laid. What Mr. Spangler wished to know were the affiliations of Lord Waveney.

Lord Waveney had done remarkably good work and had handled one or two ugly strike crises (during which Spangler had come into contact with him) with an unusual and impressive combination of firmness and justice. He worked steadily—which Labour appreciated. He was not self-seeking. “ ‘Tis a gude man, yon,” Spangler added reflectively and Lord John assented. Labour had need of Lord Waveney . . . and though it was known that he was unsympathetic with the Premier,—it was not known whether or no he was officially allied with

Lord John's party. If the Tories were definitely committed to Waveney and he to them, then naturally in any change of Government, he must receive his promotion from the hands of Lord John or Lord Beauvray.

There was not the slightest doubt in Spangler's mind as to whom the King would send for to form the next Ministry, although he had many doubts as to how long was such a Ministry likely to last. . . . Suppose, however, that Waveney were not already committed . . . then the Labour party might feel itself at liberty to approach him. . . .

All this came out very slowly in broad Yorkshire—and Lord John listened impassively, his head laid back in his favourite chair. Of course he had, or thought he had, no doubt as to Adrian's preferences; a year ago his answer would have been as swift as it was positive. To turn Waveney over to the Labour people would have been unthinkable, for he personally had never doubted that time—and marriage—would make Waveney "one of us." But he had changed. The image of his friend now evoked another and more suspicious image, that of the charming Mrs. Ashburnham—and he could not dissociate them. There had been a great deal of gossip about Mrs. Ashburnham's sudden departure for the States. Lady Allott had talked; and the Theydons, father and

daughter, had said various things. The Government was supposed to have had a hand in it—everybody knew that was why Waveney had not received promotion. Her conduct had led old Mrs. Ashburnham-Cubitt to cancel the allowance she made her nephew's widow and go back to Derbyshire in a rage.

All these things,—most of which he did not believe—caused Lord John to sit in silence for a few moments, although he did not look at his guest. Then his answer came in quite easy and final terms.

Lord Waveney, for all the Tories knew, was quite free: under no circumstances would he be offered a portfolio in the eventuality alluded to by Mr. Spangler. He would say no more. He followed these words by rising and it needed no further hint to show that the interview was at an end.

The Labour member was not perceptive enough to wonder very much. He had obtained all and more than he wanted. Between ourselves he admired Adrian none the less . . . although he attributed Lord John's attitude to quite wrong causes. As he went away in the rain, he reflected that the one thing these aristocrats could not forgive an outsider was his attempt to enter their own circle.

CHAPTER XXVIII

WOMEN are always the first to hear political gossip; no one knows exactly how they do it, but they do. Mr. James Spangler's wife was exceedingly proud of him, regarding him as the bulwark of the State; yet it is unlikely that he confided the substance of his interview to her. Lord John had a sister—the Lady Priscilla, of whom mention has been made already in these pages—and after Spangler's departure he went upstairs to tea with her; yet there is no reason to suppose that he talked more than usual. Of course, as he was Lord John, he could not be expected to possess the bourgeois reticence of Spangler—he was as indiscreet as a Duke and that is saying a good deal. On this occasion, however, it was his firm opinion that he said nothing whatever and maybe he was right. Perhaps the old butler listened at the keyhole . . . Certainly, after Lord John had drunk his tea, and was heard to leave the house, Lady Priscilla spilled the dog out of her lap and went to the telephone to call up Laura Theydon . . . Lady Priscilla was exceedingly busy that afternoon—on account of rumours that those dreadful people in the Ministry of Food were going to reduce the

rations of pet dogs one-half—she was more than driven, as she assured Miss Theydon. Still, she did call her up, and, at what she confided, Laura was very much alarmed.

Since the word had reached her that Mrs. Ashburnham had sailed for the States, Laura made one or two efforts to see Waveney and had found him pleasant and cordial and cool as of old. Since going into chambers he was more dependent on hospitality than he had been in Smith Square—he was essentially “*homme d'intérieur*” and grew weary to death of his gloomy club. This lonely state gave Laura a chance of renewing their friendship which she was not slow to seize. The news Priscilla Filmer communicated was a decided shock . . . something must be done about it at once. If it was really true that on account of Mrs. Ashburnham, the Filmers were willing to let Waveney slide into the clutches of that horrible Labour Party and thus end his chance of becoming “one of us”—surely Mrs. Ashburnham had a great deal to answer for.

Waveney responded to Laura's summons to a cup of tea with her, with flattering promptitude. She did not know that he found himself marvelling how he could ever have compared for an instant her handsome stolidity and cut and dried opinions, with Sidney's dark, delicate beauty and sensitive, stimulating mind.

He greeted her in his own friendly fashion, however, and sat down obediently, though his smile faded when she began with great seriousness to unfold what she termed "the matter of great importance" she had to tell him. Her manner in doing this was quite admirable—partly confiding, partly aloof, and tinged with all the warmth of partisanship. Nevertheless, Waveney very nearly hated her for raising the subject.

"And so—" said Laura, shaking the green earrings till they rattled . . . "I felt that you ought to know this at once before more harm was done. Of course *I* know how you feel about the Filmers, and *I* can imagine how much it would annoy you to have it supposed for an instant that these Labour people had any possible reason——"

"Wait a minute!" he said, raising his hand—"wait, Miss Theydon! I don't quite gather . . . just what it is about all this you suppose would annoy me?"

She perceived that she had shown a trifle too much eagerness: feeling it in the cool current of his voice.

"The whole thing, I supposed, would annoy you," she replied, fussing among the teacups. "Naturally you counted on Lord John's support, and it would be dreadful to have it withdrawn through an injustice . . ."

"It occurs to me that this is *his* affair, not mine."

"Your's in so far that a word from you would set it right."

"What word—if I may ask?"

She was a trifle bewildered. "The word that of course they are wholly wrong in what they think—that you have no desire in future to be under obligations to the Spanglers!"

"But my dear friend!" he paused, smiling faintly; his hand, thinner since his illness, playing with the tassel of the chair, "but, my dear friend after all, I am under obligations to none of them . . . certainly not to the Filmers. If anything, they are under obligations to me."

"Surely," Laura said, "it would be most unwise to have them antagonistic to you; all on account of . . ."

She checked: so far the name of Mrs. Ashburnham had not been spoken . . . "of a misunderstanding . . ." she finished quickly.

"The misunderstanding is not mine, you know!" he continued to speak, with slight pauses for greater earnestness . . . "You seem to forget that the responsibility in all this disgusting business of Lady Claire Winstanley belongs to her father and uncle. If you wish my view . . . if you wish my view—they have behaved with great weakness. On account of a drug habit—whose very origin

was a disgrace—Lady Claire became a public scandal and menaced the honour of the family. They were told to keep her shut up—instead of which they let her run about London with you and finally wind up with a scene of hysteria at my house during which she insulted a lady who was my guest. That they should be *pitiful* to this—to this unfortunate member of their clan, is perhaps understandable, but that she could affect their judgment about me or anyone else—is of course incredible—quite incredible.”

There was a great deal in this speech that was displeasing to Laura. In the first place, it told her nothing more than she knew already. She had half-consciously built on having the whole scandalous affair revealed to her, of which she knew only a part. She had counted on Waveney’s confiding in her—and on that thrill of intimacy between them which he certainly failed to evoke. Moreover, his attitude toward the Filmers irritated and even shocked her.

“You surprise me, I confess,” she acknowledged. “Perhaps—perhaps we’d better speak more plainly?”

“So far as I am concerned,” said Waveney flatly, “we had better not speak at all.”

“You mean you don’t *want* to set things right with Lord John? . . . Surely—when you think

of the future . . . the Goat cannot last forever and the king is certain to send for Lord John!"

Waveney had risen to set down his teacup. "Are we to discuss politics all this afternoon?" he asked coldly. He annoyed Laura more and more, and she grew a little less careful—a little less discreet.

"It isn't politics at all," she said, a slight colour coming into her cheek and a quiver to her voice—"it's a personal matter affecting your future—this whole thing. You know perfectly well that neither the Filmers nor Papa nor I, nor any of us in fact, care who your friends are in private or what relations you may have with them . . . What this Mrs. Ashburnham may be to you is nothing whatever to *us*. You must know what everybody is saying about her. It's when you mix the affair up with people like the Filmers that it counts, and I maintain they have a right to be angry . . . All I have tried to do—" and here her voice shook, for she was very sorry for herself—"is to point out that a man who wants the things in life you want, simply cannot afford to ignore the really important people and get their backs up . . . I can't understand you at all . . ." Her speech died out, for he was looking at her with a face of white anger that she had never seen before. He was really thinking in a sort of stupefaction that the fact Laura Theydon

thought the woman she hated was his mistress, should be so unimportant to her in comparison with the fact that this woman had displeased the Filmers. "It's time their world went!" was his conviction.

Characteristically, he remained silent: not affected by her agitation—she was struggling with tears by this time—but coldly aloof until she had time to recover.

"You make me f-feel how f-foolish it is to try and help a man—ever!" she finally got out; "I'll never do it again . . . What good will it do you to stick up for Mrs. Ashburnham and lose everything? She's gone away and she's not likely to return to England."

"Not as Mrs. Ashburnham," said Waveney's quiet voice, "but I hope—as Lady Waveney."

He took his leave of her immediately in the silence that followed this remark, with a manner so admirably formal and controlled as to leave Miss Theydon more furious than ever. Even though he had said nothing—perhaps because of it—she was conscious that he had had control of the interview from the first. She had allowed his reticence to lead her on far, far beyond the bounds of prudence—and now he was leaving her—quite unaffected himself, to an outburst of disappointed and angry tears.

As for Waveney, his rage had shaken his strength; but the interview had brought him

on the whole exultation. Not again for him to mistake the real things of life for the artificial; or the relations of society for the fundamental relations.

What cared he for the Filmers and Laura Theydon—people who, while knowing him so long and so well as he had supposed, could imagine him guilty of these puerile outrages and not even consider them as important?

The interview tested his nervous strength but found it firm . . . above all, it crystallized his determination to seek Sidney at once—to light his hearth-fire if need be in a far country—to leave this chaos until something like order had formed from it. He and she would find other work to do and a life that should taste sweeter in the mouth.

He sat late that night writing her a long, long letter . . . and then he wrote several others of very great importance. When he slipped out to put them into the pillar-box with his own hand, he greeted the tranquil evening sky and the great, white moon that swam in it, with the smile of a lightened heart.

EPILOGUE

CHAPTER XXIX

ON a pleasant February day, Mrs. Carter Rendall of Hempstead, L. I., accompanied by her daughter Linda (Mrs. Corbitt), took the morning train as usual, for her weekly visit to New York. She was a small, quick woman, with hair still wavy and ruddy, a round face like her daughter Mildred's, and a pair of kind, observant eyes. Mrs. Corbitt was some inches taller than her mother and rather more seriously handsome. Both were amazingly well-dressed, although proudly asserting that they "hadn't had a new thing for ages," and Linda invariably referred to her blouse of fine needle-work and real lace as "*rags*, my dear!"

The day in town was to include shopping—with its necessary prelude of a visit to Mr. Corbitt's office—a recital (both of them were honestly musical)—and a visit to Mildred's friend, Mrs. Ashburnham, at the little hotel where she was spending the winter. They had taken a very decided fancy to Mrs. Ashburnham from the November day when, heralded by the outpourings of Mildred's enthusiasm, she had appeared on their horizon. Her grace and

charm, her evident homesickness, had aroused everything that was most friendly and hospitable in Mrs. Rendall's heart; while the latter fact, although it appeared incomprehensible, had made her feel almost responsible. She knew from Mildred's letters that Mrs. Ashburnham was an American, born in New England, yet she found her with all the appeal of a stranger in an alien land. Moreover, in view of what Mildred had written concerning George's state of mind—and also, what George himself had *not* written—Mrs. Rendall liked and was grateful for Sidney Ashburnham's unconsciousness. She had chatted and made friends quite as though the elder woman were *not* watching her with a maternal appraisalment that took careful note of every word, of every glance and phrase.

“Well, I must say it seems to have been a very nice acquaintance,” she had avowed to Linda as, their first call terminated, the two ladies descended to the street, “and very lucky for Mildred that they made friends over there. Certainly, it's made her much less lonely—her letters show *that* plainly.”

Linda agreed. “I don't think Milly was ever crazy about the English either—do you, Mamma? And it's everything to have a fellow countryman to talk with . . .”

“Somehow she doesn't seem a bit like a

fellow countryman," was Mrs. Rendall's sum of her recent impressions. "I should never take her for an American—would you?"

Linda thought she should . . . pointing to the incontrovertible evidence of Mrs. Ashburnham's taste in dress.

"Do you think she—thinks of George?" came in a little solicitous burst from the older woman.

"How can I tell, dear—at this stage? She's had an English husband and perhaps she prefers them . . . "

Mrs. Rendall was shocked that Linda could suppose anyone would prefer an English husband, when she might have an American one who happened to be George. At that moment, it had seemed unwise to pursue the subject—and unfair perhaps to her son—so she had parted from Linda without further speech and even tried not to think about it while hastening to her appointment at the office of the Société des Amis de France. Her last glimmer on the matter, before being totally immersed in the business of her Committee, was that in the weeks before them she had time doubtless to discover what Sidney's attitude toward George really was, and to form her own ideas by it.

It was of this first visit and what she thought then, that Mrs. Rendall's mind was occupied on the day three months later when we find her about to repeat it. Had she discovered

Sidney's attitude? Was she in fact any nearer to discovering it than she had been that first day? She had slipped into her hand-bag, her best one with the gold monogram, a cablegram whose arrival that morning had relit the fires of speculation, and she decidedly could not answer these questions as she would have wished. Much had happened during those three months—more than we can see through Mrs. Rendall's eyes alone, but which must be sketched if what her eyes saw is to become plain to ours. The acquaintance had ripened into sincere and spontaneous liking on both sides. She had had Sidney at Hempstead and Linda had taken her motoring to Lenox. They had both given dinners for her; the Corbitts had asked her to the opening night of the Opera. The friendship had reached that definite stage, when Sidney would ask Linda's aid in the matter of choice among the innumerable small shops just off the Avenue, and when she was just as sure of her welcome if she telephoned her suggested arrival at Long Island for the week-end, as they were if they telephoned a suggested luncheon for the Monday dedicated to shopping in town. Yet with all this frankness of cordiality, Mrs. Rendall found herself still nervously wondering if this really was to be the daughter-in-law whose coming into life she dreaded almost as much as she desired.

Much as she liked Sidney, she could not feel sure how Sidney was going to fit in with the dislikes and the ideals of the Rendall family . . . They had been so lucky in Linda's husband—even to his preferring golf to tennis and his hatred of hotel life and sugared grapefruit! They could not hope to be so fortunate in George's wife. Suppose she should turn out to be crazy about travelling . . . she *did* seem to have the loose foot! Mrs. Rendall yielded to nobody in her love and admiration for the Allies in general and France in particular, and yet she worried herself to death over the thought of a daughter-in-law, who might desire to live somewhere else than Hempstead, L. I. When she confided this to Linda, even her daughter's "Mamma, you are really *too* absurd!" had not caused her to do more than smile sympathetically at herself.

Oddly enough, the one thing she didn't waste any time thinking about at all, was whether Mrs. Ashburnham was rich or poor. She rather supposed her to be the latter and she took reticence on the subject of means entirely for granted. Linda, who was younger and therefore wiser—at least in her own opinion—confided to her husband that her mother's indifference in this respect was astonishing, when one reflected that George's firm must have been seriously hit by the War and his absence and

all; and that it would be years before George could hope to get back to his previous comfortable income! At the same time that she was salving her worldly wisdom by these remarks, Linda knew perfectly well what the answer was going to be and rejoiced in its loyal sentimentality. She decidedly wanted Tom to reply, as he promptly did, that she ought to be ashamed of herself for a hard little beast, and that her mother was perfectly right and that he guessed that George hadn't wasted his time, before the War, and that the firm could stand his marriage all right, all right!

The smile that accompanied this rebuke was the one with which an American husband is very apt to receive observations of cold financial prudence from what he holds to be the idealistic half of the matrimonial circle. Linda adored him the more for it. But she really did have what her husband admiringly termed "a head on her shoulders," and her prudence and foresight had their sources in a definite efficiency. She was therefore very glad indeed when he reminded her that Mrs. Ashburnham had come over to New York on business connected with a majority interest in a stock company of which Harrison Laub had been the manipulator, and that Peter Sampson had hinted that the matter was likely to turn out very well for her. More he could not say, though more

he knew; but Linda felt that her little spasm of materialism had not been without its results.

So much for the Rendalls and their attitude. That they should be, in their own way, so much more occupied with Sidney Ashburnham than she with them, was, after all, quite natural in view of the various readjustments, illusions and disillusiones, which are the lot of every one who has been absent from home for any length of time. She had found things so different—so very different from what she had expected. Not Linda whom she came to like, for her cleverness and poise, quite as well as her warm-hearted little sister . . . not Mrs. Rendall, whom she speedily loved, while yet puzzled by the social omnipresence of the American mother. She had dined with Mrs. Sampson, lunched with Mrs. Fessenden, whose son was Peter's partner, and taken tea with Mrs. McClintock, the maternal relative of the third member of the firm. Trying to parallel her experiences, she could not but remember that, for all she ever heard of them, the Englishmen she knew might well be motherless. It took time for her to grasp this essential difference between English and American friendship: that the latter includes one's family while the former doesn't—the American expects his women folk to know his women friends, the Englishman expects the reverse.

No, it was not these kind, cordial people in whom she felt any lack; while, as for Peter Sampson, he had been a joy. From that moment on the dock when the voice with the twang in it had said: "A. is for Ashburnham, I think?" and she had turned where she stood so forlornly by her trunks to meet his greeting, Sidney had made friends at once with this boyish, understanding, red-headed man. The very way in which he replied to her protesting surprise that he should take so much trouble—the very accent in which he said: "*Why of course*, I'd have to come to meet you!" had been a revelation. She *had* forgotten the habits of her countrymen indeed!

Thereafter, as she told Mrs. Rendall, everything was made easy and her trunks, her hotel, her taxi and her luncheon had become steps in a well-ordered routine under the rulings of a minor Providence. The baggage, most of which had seemed hopelessly buried in the bowels of the ship, suddenly appeared, was examined and was dismissed. She had said good-bye to Fallon who had been a fellow-voyager and a surprising one, especially since the day before landing when she had been called upon to refuse his proposal of marriage—and had bumped and rattled off beyond the barbed wire barriers into the tremendous current of New York. And all the while the red-headed man

had said slangy, smiling things, surveying her with friendly hazel eyes.

Regarding the business matter which had brought her to America, she needed no more than one talk to feel convinced that George Rendall had chosen a wise counsellor for her. Few people know that ruthless, superstitious, corrupt, generous, materialistic and romantic world as Peter Sampson knew it, or were better fitted temperamentally to succeed in it. Himself a poor lad and his career wholly self-made, his success had been due to energy, tact and imagination, rather than to any special knowledge or remarkable determination; and he still loved a business fight for its own sake better than anything else on earth. It is true that he presented that special paradox of the American lawyer, by which he combines the highest professional ideals with the most naively cynical dodges for it is paradox to find the admirable Peter Sampson, temperate, hard-working, unselfish fellow, devoted son and brother—yet ever the cold-blooded exponent of a business theory which was a little more predatory than that of the late Captain Kidd. The structure of legislation demanded by democracy had become so complicated that the brains of democracy must be devoted to beating or escaping it, hence the new duty of the lawyer was to utilize or to evade the law.

All this had been to Sidney nothing but an additional interest, and she had often dilated on it to Mrs. Rendall and Linda, with sparkling amusement. What she had *not* dwelt on were her disillusionings and disappointments, of which Mr. Hansell her trustee, formed, perhaps, the chief. Six years ago—Sidney recalled with amazement—she had regarded Mr. Hansell as an important personage, solid, considerable, the embodiment of business sagacity—her young ideal of a man of the world. When he arrived at her hotel in response to her telegram, he turned out to be a timid, elderly, country lawyer, already mentally declining and years ago shrivelled up and left behind in the race. His manner, his clothes, his combination of cocksureness and hesitation, his bewildered distrust of her knowledge and of the world which she had won for herself—these separated them far more than the Atlantic Ocean had done. Her development, her work, her marriage had simply removed her to another planet, although for his kindness of welcome, she must like him as before.

Moreover, it became evident after ten minutes' conversation that he was unequal to the situation which had arisen in regard to her business affairs—unequal to it and afraid of it and longing to be released from the worry of it. He kept wiping his forehead and saying:

“All this has been a great responsibility; it has been very hard on me, my dear,” and Sidney could only agree that it had been very hard, and, sympathize and reassure this old friend as best she might. Meanwhile her clear sense showed her that she could handle it far better without Mr. Hansell, that her knowledge of affairs far exceeded Mr. Hansell’s, and that whatever was to be done must be done by Peter Sampson and herself. Her trustee spent a pleasant day or two in New York, talking over old times, and they had a business conference during which Peter Sampson handled him beautifully. Mr. Hansell was reassured at finding her affairs in such competent hands—as he told them both—and he drifted contentedly back to his Massachusetts home, immensely relieved that he was not to be asked to do anything difficult or complicated. As the door closed behind him, Sidney and Peter exchanged glances and Peter said, “Poor—old—lady!” in a tone of deep commiseration.

CHAPTER XXX

ONCE Mr. Hansell had been safely eliminated, Peter Sampson began, as he said, to enjoy himself; his enjoyment consisting in the opportunity which Mrs. Ashburnham's affairs afforded him of pitting his own wits against those of Mr. Harrison Laub and Mr. Dennis Haggerty—in other words against the partnership of German merchant and Irish politician—which to Peter's mind formed an union to which America owed many of her troubles. There was a great deal more than just business in all this, as he explained to his client during their many conversations.

“Whether it's dyes, or chemicals, or food, or metals doesn't matter,” Peter observed, “the pair of them simply intends to make us pay them back for what they've lost in the War . . . Laub, of course, was much too clever to identify himself with that Dernburg business . . . he doesn't care about Germany as he cares about Laub . . . all the same, he's figuring to make us pay for the loss of a perfectly good plant in Ludwigshafen and his mother's estate in Frankfurt . . . So he's just keeping quiet, subscribing to the Red Cross

and waiting to develop a nice little business in Foreign Exchange and foodstuffs . . . and how is anybody to stop him, I'd like to know?"

"And how about Haggerty?" said Sidney, deeply interested.

"Well—I'm more afraid of Haggerty on your account than of Laub," Peter confessed. "You see, he lost a brother in the Irish uprising and it has made him white-hot against England, and your husband was an English officer. He'll never settle—never in this world . . . No: Laub is our chance because he's more vulnerable—Haggerty cares more about his feelings than his bank account . . . he's the kind that would spend his last cent in order to keep you from making any . . . But I hear—y'know, there are ways of hearing, that Haggerty expects to run over to Holland the first chance he gets to see about some mighty profitable contracts—so I think we'll just wait till he's safe on board before we make any proposition . . . Lots of things to see and do here, Mrs. Ashburnham, and you're pretty comfortable?"

He smiled on her, glancing about the room, but, though Sidney assured him that she was entirely comfortable, she did not smile back. Instead, her brows drew together as if in thought. Mr. Sampson continued:

"Y'see—it's poor policy to hurry these things and you've a considerable sum at stake . . .

Under the laws of New York, our friend can do a good deal of juggling with your interest in that company until by the end of the reorganization, it'll be so small you won't recognize it . . . I know for a fact that he never expected the owner to turn up at all—he looks upon that stock as his own already——”

“I see.”

“There are some things he may try on that will give us our chance . . . He expects you to settle with him on his own terms, and, if we had any other cards, I would try a bargain with him, but you see we haven't—as it is, we've no hope but the courts . . . only that the public isn't so fond of these German deals as it used to be and that Laub has to be careful on account of his contracts . . .”

“Contracts?” she repeated reflectively . . .
“what sort of contracts?”

“Oh food-stuffs and supplies generally. I guess they're English and French—but Haggerty is far too sharp to land in England, on account of the Irish business—he'll try and work them from Holland.”

“And you say they're profitable?”

“You bet they are!”

“More than my interest—if he gets it?”

“Lord, yes!—four or five times more. Of course they are more trouble from his point of view—just as they are more important. As

I've been told they've got to get past an English Committee . . ."

"The War Trade Advisory Committee," said Mrs. Ashburnham quietly.

"Is that its name?" he stared at her—"well, anyway—to get back to the reorganization——"

"Wait a minute." She sat very still in her chair but her gesture checked the speaker, who saw that her expression was earnestly concentrated . . . "I'm rather interested in Mr. Laub's contracts. What I want to know is—why *should* they get by the War Trade Advisory Committee?"

"Eh, what?" said Peter.

"Why shouldn't they get turned down by the War Trade Advisory Committee?"

"You mean——"

Sidney arose, went to her desk and returned with certain papers in her hand. "The Chairman of that Committee," she remarked evenly, standing in front of Peter, "is Sir Thomas Easterly. I was his confidential secretary for nearly three years. His mania is naturalized Germans getting back into trade . . . There's a letter from him written when I left . . ." She selected one. "You can decide by that whether he'd pay any attention to me. Another member is his friend Lord Waveney—he's—an intimate friend of mine. There's one of his letters." She handed it to him. Peter threw away

his cigarette with an exclamation that was almost a shout.

“By Jove—Mrs. Ashburnham—by Jove!” he repeated . . . “and I was too dumb for a minute . . . by Jove, you’ve got it . . . we’ve got it! It’s beautiful . . . it’s too beautiful for words. When the right moment comes . . .”

“When the right moment comes . . . perhaps you will find we *have* something to bargain with . . . that’s all!” And her face smiled at the sudden seriousness of his.

The result of this conference had been the despatch of a very carefully thought-out letter from Sidney to Sir Thomas—and the insertion of a would-be careless postscript in a couple of others. Peter was radiant only for a time, because the chance of settlement for what he called “some real money” had the effect of raising the importance of the whole affair in his eyes, and “real money” was the only thing that ever made Peter truly serious. As for Mrs. Ashburnham, she must settle herself to a period of waiting . . . conscious that her counsel’s attitude both toward her and toward her business had vastly heightened in consideration. Her mind at times could not but dream over the prospect of comfort and leisure which this hope of an additional income brought her . . . and Waveney’s complete ignorance of it, she hugged to herself with joy. He seemed to take her

disappointment in the affair for granted and made it the occasion of a letter whose deep and intense feeling caused her cheeks to burn.

Meanwhile another person had entered tranquilly into a period of waiting—the same type of waiting that is done by a cat when he settles down before a mouse hole. Mr. Harrison Laub had been extremely annoyed, *jolted* in Peter's parlance, when he heard that the owner of a certain interest in a certain company had arrived in New York and had employed as her counsel, the firm of Sampson, McClintock and Fessenden, with whom he had had trouble before. Not only was Peter the type of antagonist most to be dreaded, because he hides his moves under a cloak of evasive good humour, but he was also counsel to a banking house which more than any other in Wall Street had opposed the plans of Laub and Haggerty. Mr. Laub therefore had been obliged to change his tactics—which he was too German to like doing. There had been the usual interviews between Peter and himself—during which both of them had been very bluff and frank indeed . . . and Laub had offered to buy out the Ashburnham interest at a figure which Peter had merely waved aside under the offer of a cigar.

There the matter rested for many weeks . . . for so many indeed that Mr. Laub began to reflect that Sampson was by no means so

energetic and sharp as formerly. The influence of Mason & Co. in regard to certain loans might have been felt quite disagreeably, whereas it had not been felt at all . . . Undoubtedly, if he simply dragged it on long enough, the lady would get tired waiting for her money and Peter for his fee . . .

But Laub was by no means a stupid man—his career showed that—and therefore the January day on which he was handed a cablegram from his partner, the exceedingly disagreeable shock it caused him by no means blinded his eyes. This cablegram was not long and it was white-hot. It stated that for some unaccountable reason their agents refused to sign, or even to consider signing, their agreed contracts. So far as Haggerty could discover, some hostile and powerful English influence had been at work black-listing the firm, and so infecting with suspicion the Dutch and French, that they refused to do business until their doubts had been removed. Haggerty added that it was up to Laub to find out what all this meant.

The recipient of this message, standing very precisely dressed by his desk, read it twice and then took off his eye-glasses and stretched forth his hand to the telephone. He did not have to find out . . . he knew.

A high degree of complex evolution has produced in the American business man a trained

specialist, impeccable in his particular branch of psychology, while handling his work in a romantic, not to say artistic, manner. Stevenson alone among moderns has touched on this, and Stevenson would have delighted in Peter Sampson. He handled the interview with Mr. Laub superbly, revealing to his antagonist in glimpses, as it were, the illimitable possibilities of injury to the plans of himself and partner which were likely to ensue unless he did the proper thing by Peter's client; while at the same time he succeeded in opening to Laub's imagination the profits that these contracts might eventually bring—in such a manner as to minimize the sum she asked for by comparison. While he frightened Laub pretty thoroughly in the delicate operation of laying bare the other's financial resources and showing them to be inadequate to survive the loss of these contracts, he also managed to make it plain that the stock deal might well be jettisoned to save a situation which promised—unless interfered with—to be more profitable than Laub had ever even dreamed. The result was that two hours later he walked out of Laub's office with a smile on his face, and a verbal agreement to settle on terms for which he might well be proud.

Then came the day, a month later, which was to hold the final act of this drama. Sidney long remembered that hour in Mr. Laub's office—the

bright, hard cold without; the icy canyon below the windows, choked with noontide crowds and resounding to newsboy voices; Peter, smiling and jolly; Laub, precise, formal and steelly; herself a little doubtful and more than a little excited. Vague pictures arose in her inward vision, maintained themselves, clear and detailed, for a breath and then vanished . . . a curious series . . . Mildred's face, Dora's, full of respectful joy, Waveney's, and last and most persistent of all—that softly coloured and book-lined room in Smith Square with the two of them seated by the fire together in perfect friendship . . . Was it after all to be her privilege to give that room back to him, exorcised of the evil spirit which had filled it with such a bitter memory?

She signed her name here and there where they told her . . . Very little was said until she was in the act of drawing on her gloves again. Then Laub, with that faint thickening of an accent which marred his careful speech, addressed her:

“Perhaps—now that all is settled already and one may speak more freely—perhaps Mrs. Ashburnham will not mind telling me who her friends are on the other side, who came so promptly to her assistance?”

“Ah, but—they didn't know, of course, that it was coming to my assistance——”

“In that case it is all the more remarkable and my curiosity is permitted?”

Sidney had a feeling that Peter Sampson's solemn expression meant he would rather she didn't gratify Mr. Laub's curiosity; but her judgment was different. She saw no object in making enemies and certainly Laub was a good loser. So she replied: “You mean Sir Thomas Easterly, I think? I was his private secretary for three years and he is the Chairman of the War Trade Advisory Committee.”

Mr. Lamb threw up his hands with an expressive gesture and made her a slight bow.

“It is always you ladies . . .” he said, “you are always successful . . . always! But now you are satisfied, eh? Are you not? You have had your own terms, you will remember that I hope—when you next write your friend, the eminent Sir Thomas Easterly?”

She assured him that a letter had already been drafted, removing so far as her own knowledge extended, any doubt as to the motives of himself and his firm. Mr. Laub took occasion to remark that it had been bad enough to have one's loyalty under suspicion on account of the accident of birth, and it was surely unjust to perpetuate these ill-feelings to poison the era of good faith which he saw dawning for the world's trade . . . Sidney shook hands with him on this admirable sentiment, and, as he accompanied

her affably to the elevator, she thought that the anxious gleam of his eye-glasses was somewhat lessened.

They descended many, many stories . . . Peter was joyously whistling under his breath, and Sidney felt calm and quiet, although she knew that she emerged upon the street having been made quite reasonably comfortable for all the rest of her life.

CHAPTER XXXI

Now with all these occurrences, Mrs. Rendall—whom we have left for some time past in the train on her way to New York from Hempstead—had been made perfectly acquainted; having learned them from Sidney in joyful gushes over the telephone and from Sidney's counsel by means of his friend Corbitt. This was to be, in truth, a visit of congratulation, the joy of which she fully expected to heighten by means of the cablegram she had not forgotten to tuck into her handbag and which contained nothing less than the important news of Mildred's imminent arrival. Not only her happiness at the thought of holding dear, brave, lonely Mildred in her arms again, was keen for its own sake, but because it was a portent of the peace she had hardly yet believed in. Mildred's return in safety was an earnest of George's and meant the recapture of those old days when the shadow of European warfare never darkened their small individual happiness. And now perhaps that circle of family life, was to be strengthened by another link—though Mrs. Rendall was average enough to undergo actually a momentary shrinking as of jealous dread—

when she anticipated how her own feelings were going to be shared by Mrs. Ashburnham . . . Indeed, as she took the elevator to that lady's parlor, she really had to tell herself not to be absurd.

Sidney was waiting for her friend . . . waiting it would seem in considerable impatience and welcomed her entrance and her greeting, "Well, dear child!" with a sudden outpouring of affection, which was somehow or other startling. Mrs. Rendall was enveloped in an embrace and her wraps laid aside—with a warmth of cordiality which she had not before associated with Sidney's calm reticence of behaviour. Her thought was that either Sidney must be very fond of money; or else that she had been much more in need of it and anxious concerning it than they had supposed, since this good fortune appeared to uplift and excite her to such a degree . . .

This was to be, however, but the first of her surprises. The cablegram, which she produced so gaily and proudly—handing it to Sidney with—"Now what do you think of *that*—dear? Isn't it splendid?" was read and exclaimed over by the other—with joy, it is true, and with enthusiasm—but still with an air that it was a matter entirely outside . . . Mrs. Ashburnham's dark eyes, were filled at the moment with some vision which had nothing whatever to do

with Mildred Rendall. She repeated that it was splendid — splendid — delightful — and then she hurried on:

“And I too—you see—I too have had a cablegram this morning!”

“From Mildred?” Mrs. Rendall asked puzzled, finding a chair.

“No; not from Mildred . . .” she laughed happily . . . “from an even more important person than Mildred!”

Then it all came out in a flood—a flood which had broken all barriers and poured in the happiest confidence into the keeping of this elder woman of whose sympathy one must feel assured. Mrs. Ashburnham was radiant—her face had regained shining youth—her eyes glowed . . . she talked—now pacing the room—now sitting beside Mrs. Rendall and holding her hand, and as she talked she beheld nothing but happiness. The other need only sit passive and listen . . . occupied the while in readjusting herself to the undoubted fact that the Englishman who was landing to-morrow in New York, was going to marry Sidney, and that they had cared for each other a long time . . . This was the suprising news with all its implications, not least of which was the removal of this new friend from their particular group and her disappearance into a world of which they had small knowledge and no experience. *This* was

the news with which she must greet Mildred—while as for George——

If Sidney had been in the mood to observe it, she would have seen Mrs. Rendall's face acquire a new look. The mouth still steadfastly smiled, but the eyes lost their youthful, humorous alertness, and became wise and weary and almost old. It was the mother-face, that comes of having learned the total unexpectedness of youth. She was one whom Life could no longer surprise and one who knew that whatever parcel the future may bring us, disappointment is certain to be the cord that ties it . . . At the moment, she remembered that she was fond, very fond of Sidney Ashburnham. So she pressed the girl's cold hands as she listened to the story; she made sympathetic sounds at its darker crises; she smiled with the other's smile at its radiant prospect of joy. She heard how wonderful Adrian was, how good, how wise; and agreed it would be a privilege to become the wife of such a man. But she made no independent observation until Sidney, whose heart was full and running over into affectionate impulses . . . must needs choose and read to her a portion of Adrian's letters, so that her friend might see for herself what he really was. Mrs. Rendall's comment then was interesting: "But how very American he sounds!" she said surprisedly. Sidney smilingly agreed. "I think

he has grown more American since knowing me," she suggested, and Mrs. Rendall guessed that it must be so. Shortly afterwards she pleaded an engagement. On parting, she kissed the younger woman and wished her joy with the sincerest warmth and made her promise to bring him to Hempstead . . . although, while her voice gave the invitation, she felt that she didn't see Lord Waveney, somehow, at Hempstead . . . Sidney's happy voice responded to remind her that they would both be on the dock next morning to meet the travellers, and then the door closed. The elder woman found herself once more alone, descending in the elevator and leaving Mrs. Ashburnham in the upper storey. It seemed, somehow, just the place where one would leave Mrs. Ashburnham!

Mrs. Rendall came to the hotel doorway and stood there undecidedly, looking up and down the street. She felt a trifle dazed . . . the mental shift had been somewhat sudden. To have gone through all the maternal emotions involved in adjusting one's mind to a certain sequence of events, only to find that it was the wrong sequence—was a jar—decidedly a jar—and it took her breath. She did not clearly know what she felt as yet—she was still conscious only of that fundamental amazement. Gradually, as she stood in the doorway, her thoughts began to take shape and rise one after another to be dealt with . . .

Mildred's disappointment was going to be very keen—on her own account and on her brother's. As for George—who could say? His mother could only hope that this had not gone too deep with him—after all, she told herself reassuringly, he could not have seen so very much of the lady! Peter Sampson, too—it was almost comic to reflect how *he* was going to feel. All that money! She could only smile, ruefully enough, at the recollection of Peter's expression when he told them the amount and added that he knew old George had enough—but then one could never tell when capital was going to come in handy . . . Mrs. Rendall remembered that she had rebuked him for the remark with an "Oh hush, Peter—how can you?" and felt that she must be prepared henceforth to sustain and to support herself by that attitude.

The day was crisp and very cold. Early shadows had begun to creep across the street and the acrid note of the city's clamour was deadened. Mrs. Rendall still lingered in the doorway and her thoughts enfolded her. The door-boy noticed the smart middle-aged figure . . . he supposed the lady was waiting for her car. The lady was meanwhile harkening to inward voices . . . her face was absorbed.

Well, this, so far as the Rendalls were concerned, was the end of Mrs. Ashburnham . . .

the end that is to say of her being associated in any intimate or vital sense with the future of their lives. No doubt they would see her at intervals . . . but one knew the world and one knew how little that could mean . . . She would vanish beyond their horizon in a rosy cloud of happiness. One pictured their seeing her photograph some day in the "Illustrated English News" and saying to each other "We knew her once!" and perhaps taking pains to hide the paper from George . . . The mother drew a sharper breath for she felt a pang of the pain that was going to come to George.

Pain, then, and disappointment were the chief results of their having known Mrs. Ashburnham; and Mrs. Rendall reflected that pain and disappointment were almost always the result, when one's path was crossed by one of those picturesque people. She should have expected it; it was the price to be paid for the excitement of their friendship . . . and most people held that this was worth the price. The Sidneys of this world keep alive its romance and often furnish the only means which may link the grey rest of us, however vicariously, with its larger movements, its passions and its achievements. This thought drew Mrs. Rendall to wonder, if, after the shock was past, she were not going to feel relieved . . . The unknown is to be dreaded, however picturesque . . . The alien is

always the alien, and she had never felt that Sidney was typically American . . .

Evidently the shock was beginning to pass or she would not have thought of this or of its corollary—the letter she had just heard read aloud. If Sidney was not typically American, was this man she proposed to marry typically English? Certainly not, according to Mrs. Rendall's view . . . The note struck in the letter had been intensely new to her. Where and how had he learned it—this national note, of which people like the Rendalls are so intensely proud, and which they knew, under all the surface noise and dissonance, to be the deeper choral of the Republic? Had he learned it from Sidney, or in lesser degree from Mildred and from George? Was this the real meaning of the Odyssey of these tremendous years?

Yes: the shock had passed and she recognized her final mood for one of relief—a relief that was coloured by a very special sense of fitness. Sidney and Adrian—that was an alliance which, symbolic as well as actual, might mean much toward the way of solution for the troubles of a faltering world . . .

Mrs. Rendall left the shelter of the doorway and began to walk away from the hotel down the sunny side of the street.

THE END

1871
1872
1873
1874
1875
1876
1877
1878
1879
1880
1881
1882
1883
1884
1885
1886
1887
1888
1889
1890
1891
1892
1893
1894
1895
1896
1897
1898
1899
1900

LIBRARY OF CONGRESS



00022269136